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BUFFALO BILL'S DROP



"HANDS UP! IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE!" COMMANDED BUFFALO BILL.

OR,

DEAD-SHOT NED The Kansas Kid.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL'S BOY MASCOT,"
"BUFFALO BILL'S CRACK-SHOT PARD," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE FEUD BETWEEN THEM.

"GREAT SCOTT! it is the camp of the Wynkoop emigrant train, and our people are not three miles away.

"A meeting between the two trains means death to many."

"What shall I do, what can I do to prevent bloodshed, for on the trails each follow they must meet; yes, they are bound, as we are, into the Big-Horn country."

The speaker was a youth of eighteen, well grown for his age, well formed, and with a face which well expressed boldness and determination.

He was dressed in border garb, had a belt of arms about his waist, and a rifle slung at his back, while, peeping out of some bushes at the top of a hill, he had a fieldglass in his hand, with which he had just made some important discovery; one that had blanched his bronzed cheeks and caused him to speak as we have repeated, when his eyes had fallen upon a camp in a little valley not half a mile from where he was under cover.

He stood like one at a loss what to do, for by his glass he had recognized those in the camp, and who, judging by his words, must be foes to himself and to others camped not far away.

"Only to think that the Wynkoop people should have come this way!"

"Does it mean that, in this new land, the bitter feud must be kept up as in the past?"

"I do not know just what is best to do, so will return to camp and talk with father and our guide."

He took another long look through his glass at the camp in the valley and saw that there were half a hundred wagons, several ambulances, a few buckboards, and fully two hundred people, with horses, cattle, and a complete outfit for establishing homes in a new country.

The youth sighed as he looked at them, and then, walking back through the thicket, came to his horse, a fine animal, which he mounted and rode down the hill until he came to a narrow valley, through which ran a small stream.

Halting in the stream for his horse to drink, he was looking down into the water when, suddenly, he heard hoof-falls, and there quickly dashed up a horseman, who also halted.

Neither had seen the other, as a clump of willows had hidden them from view; but now the discovery was made at the same instant, and more, there was a quick and mutual recognition, the action of both showing that a hostile encounter might follow.

The new-comer was also well mounted, armed, and clad in frontier garb, while he, too, was a youth.

About the age of the first youth presented to the reader, he had a dark, handsome face, but one that was undeniably sinister and reckless in expression.

"What ill wind blew you into this country, Ned Duncan, for I know you, though you are in Wild West togs, and I thought you far away?" said the one who had just ridden into the stream, and he held his revolver in his hand as he spoke.

The other had also drawn a weapon, and the two were not ten paces apart, while the latter replied:

"I might ask you the same question, Willis Wynkoop, only I happen to know that your father's camp is over in the next valley, so suppose you are hunting homes here."

"As you are. For I know that your camp is not very far away, and so it means that destiny has led us both here, and you know the Wynkoops are not the ones to bury the hatchet, while you hold one life to your credit."

"It was a strange destiny, Willis Wynkoop, that brought our paths together

again, after they had parted, as all hoped and believed, forever; but, as it is so, and bloodshed must follow, I have something to propose to you that other lives may not be sacrificed."

"What is it, Ned Duncan?"

"As you said, our people hold one life that has not been avenged, and so I offer what I do."

"I mean that we can end this feud of blood with your life or mine."

"We can make a compact, for I have a pencil and paper, pledging ourselves that this vendetta shall end with your death or mine, and urging the pledge to be kept sacred by those whom we represent."

"If we do this, the feud can end; if not, then you know what sorrow and death-blows must follow."

"Are you willing to do this?"

"And fight you here, to-day?"

"Yes, it is the Sabbath day; our respective camps are resting, and the one who survives can return to his people and tell of the compact between us, and then send word to your camp, or mine, as it may be, to come here after the body, and make known the compact between us which ends the feud forever."

"This is what I ask, and as I do not believe you to be a coward, I will expect you to agree to my terms."

"I will do it, Ned Duncan; but, how can a duel be fought between us without seconds?"

"Why not go to camp and let us have friends to witness the fight?"

"You know that, in that case, your father and mine would be the ones to meet, not you and I, and their lives are valuable, while ours are of little or no account."

"I'll go you, if it can be a square, stand-up fight—no trickery, mind you."

"I am not of that kind; but, let us first write that compact, and then we can ride a hundred yards apart, leaving our rifles at a certain point between us."

"Then we can start toward each other, firing with our revolvers until one of us falls dead, for wounding must not count."

"I am agreed."

"Now to the compact," said Willis Wynkoop.

CHAPTER II.

THE DEATH COMPACT.

Ned Duncan, the first to replace his revolver in his belt, rode out of the stream and dismounted.

Willis Wynkoop followed his example, and the two staked out their horses and approached each other.

As they did so it was noticeable that they were well matched in height and physique—that both were fine specimens of manly youth, and it seemed strange and pitiable that they should meet there in that wild land only to carry out a deadly feud that had existed long between their people.

Taking a little sketch book, half filled with drawings, from his saddle pocket, Ned Duncan sat down by a rock, and with a pencil began to write, remarking as he did so:

"If I go wrong, tell me, Willis Wynkoop."

"I will, but I guess you know about what to write," was the reply.

Then Ned Duncan wrote, in a bold hand, in which there was no tremor, as follows:

"Camp Sweetwater Mountains,

"May 10th, 18—"

"We, the undersigned, Willis Wynkoop and Edward Duncan, late of Kansas, having unexpectedly met each other

here, in this wild land, while the people of each are on the way to seek new homes in a new country, hoping never to cross the path of the other in life, and, being well aware of what this meeting means to those we love, have hereby agreed on this spot to offer ourselves as a sacrifice to forever end the long, bitter and deadly feud that has existed between our respective families and friends."

"To this end we pledge ourselves, and demand that all others connected with us shall sacredly keep the pledge and live by this compact, namely, that the death of one of us, or both, if so it be, shall wholly end this vendetta."

"That the one who survives, if so it be that one does, shall go to the camp of the one slain and report what has been done, and where the body of the other can be found."

"That, in case both should meet death here, this paper shall be placed by our rifles upon a stick, and the compact must be kept, when found, and the two wagon trains go separate ways without meeting."

"Witness our signatures,

Willis Wynkoop,

"In the name of my people."

Edward Duncan,

"In the name of my people."

"That is just what it should be."

"Now, in case both fall, write below the conditions of the duel," said Willis Wynkoop.

This was also done, and the two youths added their signatures, as seen.

Then this strange compact was put upon a stick, driven in the ground in the valley, and close at hand were placed the rifles of each youth.

Their horses were then mounted and a starting point for each was staked out, a hundred yards from where the rifles lay and upon either side.

"We will mount here at the centre, Willis, ride in a walk to the turning stake, and when we turn dash toward each other firing."

"Is that satisfactory?"

"Yes, and I advise you to get at your prayers, for I intend to kill you," was the sneering response.

"It would seem like mockery to me to pray when I was going to kill a fellow-being," replied Ned Duncan.

"Ah! you speak of it as though you are sure of your game, Ned."

"I certainly do not intend to allow you to kill me if I can prevent it," was the response.

"I know you to be a dead shot; I know what you have done, boy, though you are; but I intend to avenge my brother whom you killed, and that will even matters so that this infernal feud may be dropped, unless your father takes a fancy to avenge you."

"Does not the compact bind them to obey?"

"If they keep it."

"They must, for that is why I agree to this duel."

"If you should kill me, why, then your side will have two lives against us."

"Stick to the compact, Willis, for it will prevent many more deaths, and you certainly do not wish your father and others to fall in avenging you, any more than I do."

"No. I guess the compact goes as written, only it will be very hard for the Wynkoops to end with two lives unavenged, should I fall."

"Better so than many more, especially as now that all of us have come

"This wild land death will be a very serious matter."

"That is so."

"I love life dearly, Willis Wynkoop, and—"

"Don't your conscience trouble you for killing my brother?" sneered the other.

"You know that I acted entirely in self-defense, for your brother so confessed before he died."

"But, I was saying, as dearly as I loved life, if I felt certain that my death at your hands would end this vendetta, I would allow you to kill me, and so let it rest; but I believe all will be governed by our death compact."

"Ah, yes, doubtless; but I shall kill you if I can, and you'll be a fool to allow me to do so if you can prevent."

"Are you ready?"

"All ready!"

"Then let us start on our ride. Good-by, Willis, and if I am the one to fall tell them that I met my fate as a brave man would."

He held out his hand, which the other did not take, and the two started to ride from the rifles to their respective starting points to begin the duel.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGER "CHIPS IN."

The valley where the two youths had so strangely met and entered into their remarkable and deadly compact was not a very wide one. On one side of it ran the little stream before referred to.

Along the brow of the hills upon either side of the vale grew a fringe of small timber, and half way between this and the stream the field for the encounter had been selected.

It was an open space, devoid of tree or of rock of large size; the sward was of a short grass, and the stake on which fluttered the fateful compact and by which lay the rifles was distinctly visible for some distance up and down the depression.

The day was a beautiful one, full of sunlight and as silent as death, a Sabbath stillness which the two youths meant soon to break with the crack of revolvers as they sought each other's life.

At a walk the two horses started for the stakes around which they were to turn, after which they could dash forward at full speed or at the will of their rider, the revolvers being aimed and fired when desired.

Willis Wynkoop had a significant expression upon his face, as he rode away from the centre stake. It was both a sinister smile and look almost malignant.

He drew his revolver before he had gotten ten paces from the centre stake; then he halted his horse, gazed back at his enemy, and the expression on his handsome-featured face became vicious, tigerishly threatening.

He seemed to have made up his mind to some act which would free him from all danger and bring down his enemy.

Quickly he turned his horse, and there rode his unsuspecting foe not thirty paces away.

Drawing his horse in line, Willis Wynkoop slowly raised his revolver to take a deliberate aim, resting the weapon hand upon his left arm as he held it out.

Another moment and he would have pulled the trigger, but, suddenly, there came in loud, commanding tones:

"Hands up, there, or I'll send a bullet through your treacherous heart!"

The effect was so startling upon Willis Wynkoop that his finger, resting on

the trigger, nervously pulled it, and the report followed.

But the aim had been destroyed by the startling command, and the bullet flew wide of its mark.

At the report Ned Duncan quickly turned in his saddle, for the words uttered had warned and startled him, and he faced his dishonorable foe.

And he faced the one, too, who had uttered the threatening command.

When Willis Wynkoop, in alarm, had pulled the trigger of his revolver, he, too had turned to see who had so mysteriously appeared upon the scene and thus had thwarted him in his attempt to murder the youth who had trusted him.

He was the more dismayed to behold a rifle leveled at him and not a hundred feet from him!

He then heard, added to the stern command:

"Hands up, if you value your life!"

Ned Duncan was facing him now, and he saw but one way to escape death, which was to promptly obey the command.

This he did, his eyes riveted upon the new-comer as he dropped his revolver and raised his hands above his head.

Ned Duncan could not at first take in the situation; he could not realize that Willis Wynkoop, though a bitter foe, would attempt to kill him like an assassin.

Gazing at the newcomer after a quick glance at his enemy, he saw, as did Willis Wynkoop, a man mounted upon a superb roan horse, that had on a handsome bridle and fine Mexican saddle.

The animal stood perfectly still, reined back after he had sprung out of the willows, where, doubtless, the horseman had been in concealment while the scene was being enacted by the two boys.

But the rider—

It was he who now riveted the gaze of the two youths, as, with a word to his horse, he came slowly toward Willis Wynkoop, his rifle ready to send a double shot at the first sign of hostility.

He was a man of splendid build, tall, broad-shouldered, and slender, though athletic.

His seat in the saddle was perfect, and his appearance most striking.

The dress of the stranger was buckskin hunting shirt and leggings, large spurs glittered upon his heels, and a picturesque slouch hat was upon his head.

But it was the face of the stranger which was most attractive, for, once seen, it never would be forgotten.

Darkly bronzed, and with a long moustache, each feature was perfect in mold, and each bore its imprint of fearlessness and invincible will.

The eyes were large, dark, shaded by long lashes and full of expression, now blazing with anger as they were bent upon Willis Wynkoop.

Nearer and nearer he came, and at last was within easy pistol range when Willis Wynkoop called out:

"You nail him, Ned, and give me a chance, for he means to kill us both."

CHAPTER IV.

BUFFALO BILL.

At the words of Willis Wynkoop Buffalo Bill's rifle again flew to a level, and in deep tones came the words:

"If you make a move, young man, I send a bullet through this boy's heart."

"I shall not act, sir, for I do not believe you mean harm to me," declared Ned Duncan.

"On the contrary I saved you from this fellow's treachery."

"Don't believe him, Ned Duncan. He is an outlaw and will down us both, if you do not pull the trigger on him," cried Wynkoop.

The stranger smiled in a peculiar way, but rode up to Willis Wynkoop and took his revolvers from his belt.

Then he threw his lasso coil about him, pinioned his arms down to his side.

Willis Wynkoop was deadly pale now, and said reproachfully:

"You stand by and allow me to be thus treated, Ned Duncan, for, even though we are foes, we should be together against a common outlaw."

"Had this gentleman intended to harm you, Wynkoop, he would not have acted as he did."

"I wish to hear what he has to say, for there is something about this that I do not understand."

"I will explain in a few words, my young friend."

"Don't believe him, Duncan."

"You can do as you please when you have heard my story."

"I will."

"I do not know about the quarrel between you, only that there appears to be a deadly one."

"I take it, too, that you belong to a wagon train on the trail over in the next valley, or you would not be here."

"I have been on that trail, and I camped here for noon, and had just led my horse in from feeding, and was saddling up in the timber here, when I saw you approaching down the slope of the hill."

He nodded toward Ned Duncan as he spoke.

"I was about to hail you, while your horse was drinking in the stream, when your enemy here came up the valley."

"I waited and saw that there was trouble between you. I could not hear all that was said, but I saw and heard enough to know that there was bad blood and you were going to fight a duel."

"I waited to see the result, determined to chip in at the right time, for I am not one to like to witness scenes of bloodshed, though my life is amid the worst of tragedies."

"The moment you began to ride to your positions I saw that this young fellow was playing the traitor act, and I watched him closely, saw him turn in his saddle, glance at you, and then wheel his horse to fire at your back."

"He intended to take no chances, but to deliberately murder you."

"It is a lie, Duncan! but of course you do not believe this fellow."

The stranger smiled serenely and resumed:

"I was going to ride toward the centre post, as you reached the starting points, but I saw I had to act, and quickly; so I brought your traitor pard here to time."

Ned Duncan seemed deeply pained at the story told by the stranger of the act of treachery.

He was of too noble a nature himself to believe his enemy could be guilty of such dishonor and cowardice.

But he now felt that it was true, and more, the words and acting of Wynkoop, in wishing him to side with him against the strange horseman had been proof of his guilt.

He looked hurt and indignant, rather than angry at Willis, while he offered his hand to the unknown, and said:

"I feel that I owe you my life, sir, and I can only thank you for it."

"I did not believe that Willis Wynkoop would be guilty of an act so base, rather than risk his life with me, for he

comes of a brave race, and I know his father to be a most honorable man, though my enemy, yes, the enemy of all my kindred and friends.

"I wish I could do more than thank you, sir."

"Don't mention it, my boy, for I have the satisfaction of having saved life, where, often, it is my duty to take it.

"But will not this quarrel be resumed after I set him free, for I do not, of course, intend to hold him a prisoner."

"No, for after what he has been guilty of, I cannot of course meet him, though I must hold myself ready to face any one whom he may send to face me."

"This is a strange affair, it seems to me."

"It is both strange and peculiarly sad, sir."

"Is it a feud between you?"

"That is just what it is, a cruel vendetta, and has been for three generations, for it dates back to early days in Kansas, where the fight was between the Free State and Slavery State people as to which should rule."

"Ah! I can well understand the situation when you say that, for I am from Kansas myself, and my family have been great sufferers through the fight of the two factions—in fact, my father was killed by the party that were in favor of making Kansas a slave state."

"May I ask your name, sir?"

"William F. Cody, of Leavenworth, Kansas."

"If you are William F. Cody of Leavenworth, then you must be the great scout, guide and Indian fighter whom all know as Buffalo Bill," said Ned Duncan, with great earnestness.

The answer came in quiet tones:

"Yes, I am Buffalo Bill."

CHAPTER V.

THE STORY OF A FEUD.

Even Willis Wynkoop looked upon the man before him now with intensest interest, as he heard the talismanic name of Buffalo Bill, and knew that he stood in the presence of a man who had won a famous name upon the frontier.

As for Ned Duncan he seemed almost awed, yet delighted, and said:

"I have never seen you, sir, but oh! how much we have heard of you!"

"We are not from near Leavenworth, but you may have heard of what is known as the Wynkoop-Duncan Vendetta."

"Indeed I have, and it has been a cruel one, for many lives have been lost on each side, as friends and relatives joined in the fight.

"Your name is Duncan, I take it, for you look like a Southerner."

"Yes, sir, we are from Alabama, and my father is Captain Dean Duncan."

"I have seen him once, and heard much of him.

"You were of the slavery faction, therefore on the other side from me, but from all I have heard, it was the Wynkoops who began this feud against the Duncans."

"Yes, sir, for my grandfather was shot by the father of this young man, who is Willis Wynkoop.

"His death was avenged by my uncle, and this led to the families who were our kinspeople and friends, taking sides with us, while the others also had a strong following, and when they met death was sure to follow the meeting. It then became a life for a life, and even the boys were brought into the fight.

"So it went on, sir, until the eldest brother of Willis Wynkoop here met me on the trail one day, and challenged me to fight him.

"He had a friend with him, but I could not back down, and—I killed him.

"His friend was a square fellow, and told just how it happened, and sick of so much bloodshed, father desired to leave Kansas and come to the Far West to find a new home.

"The result was that all our kin and friends decided to also come. So we made up a train and with our whole outfit started for this part of the country under the guidance of Lew Sykes, whom you must know as a great guide."

"I know him, and he could not bring you to a more beautiful country than he has, if you are strong enough to hold your own against the Indians, which I take it you are, from the size of your outfit."

"You have seen it then?"

"No, only the trail up the next valley."

"That is not our trail, sir."

"Not your trail?" repeated Buffalo Bill with surprise.

"No, sir, for our camp is several miles over in this direction."

"Then what large wagon outfit is it that was up the next valley here?"

"The Wynkoop train, sir, for I was out on a hunt alone, and I came upon it and recognized Major Ellis Wynkoop in the camp, and I tell you it was a surprise to me, for I did not know that he had left Kansas."

"Nor did we know that your accursed gang had left Kansas," broke in Willis Wynkoop, savagely.

"We were forced by our women folks to leave Kansas, and are on our way to this country to find homes, and here we are, the Wynkoops and Duncans, with all their outfit camped almost upon the same trail, and within a few miles of each other!"

"That means another fight to the death, for you or yours can't escape us, Ned Duncan."

"You won't find that we will try very hard to run away, though."

"All of us had hoped there would be an end of killing, and as we have met here, if you wish to keep the secret, I will, and we can go separate ways, Willis, and there end the feud in that way."

"No! The Wynkoops never run from a foe, and as our trails have brought us together again, the vendetta must go on," was the hateful remark.

"No! no! There has been death and sorrow enough, and we can go our separate ways from our present camps, and so not meet, if you will only keep the secret as I will," urged Ned Duncan.

"I will not," was the vicious response of the bound boy, and his face showed a malignant satisfaction in the story he had to tell.

"Willis Wynkoop, you know that those of my name are not cowards—that we have never turned our back against odds; but, what except evil and sorrow has this vendetta caused, and I beg of you to consider before you act.

"You and I alone know the secret that a strange fate has brought the Wynkoops and Duncans together in this almost pathless wilderness, for this gentleman will not tell what he has discovered, I feel sure."

"I will not," assured Buffalo Bill, firmly.

"See! we can keep the secret; your train can go on its way, I will see that our trail will go far from yours, and that they shall not meet again."

"No!" bravely exclaimed Willis.

"Think of your mother, of whom I had thought of with sorrow when I killed your brother.

"You have a sister, too, and she will

suffer, while there are many dear to you, all of whom must face bitter blows that are sure to fall should your party and mine meet.

"Think of all there is to lose and nothing to gain except revenge, while you, Willis, may be one of the first to go under."

"No! no! Keep the secret and do not let the two outfits meet, I beg of you."

"Bah! don't talk like a woman, for meet now they must!"

"They shall not meet," came in the stern tones of Buffalo Bill, and there was a fierce light in his eyes as he turned them upon Willis Wynkoop and uttered the words.

CHAPTER VI.

BUFFALO BILL'S WINNING HAND.

In his hatred for the Duncans, Willis Wynkoop had almost forgotten that Buffalo Bill was present; but the words of the scout recalled him promptly to the fact of his presence, and he fairly started at the utterance.

But Willis Wynkoop was ever ready for the "game of bluff," and he tried it on with Buffalo Bill by saying, insolently:

"I should like to know what business you have to chip in, if you are the great Buffalo Bill, the terror."

"I believe I have been called a terror by evil-doers, and as I look upon you as a very tough character you will find that I will act with you as I do with other criminals."

"Criminals!" almost shrieked the youth.

"Yes, a criminal of the most despicable kind, for you would now be an assassin, had I not interfered. You are too much of a coward to face an honorable foe, and so you sought to shoot him in the back."

"You shall answer for this, some day, Buffalo Bill."

"If you were a man I would answer now, and thus protect myself from a snake in the grass, a ruffian who would shoot in the back; but I say right now, if you dare tell your people that their foes, the Duncans, have, by a most remarkable coincidence, come also to this country, and are now encamped half a dozen miles from them, I will go to your camp and make known your cowardly act to kill this boy."

"I know that your father is no man to tolerate an assassin, even if his son is that man; and the people who are with him would denounce you too, so now give me your oath that you will say nothing of this meeting with young Duncan, or that you know of the others having come into this region; otherwise I will take you to camp, bound as you are, and tell the whole story of your cowardice and treachery."

"What do you say? Speak quickly, for if I make up my mind to take you, I will not relent for all the promises you can make at the last moment."

The scout was thoroughly in earnest, as Willis Wynkoop fully realized.

He knew well that his father would be the first one to turn against him for his dastardly attempt to kill a Duncan, for outside of the feud, the Wynkoop clan had no stain against their name.

He knew that his mother, his sister, and all others, with exceptions, perhaps, would regard him in the light that the scout did, as a coward who had acted the part of a traitor.

"Although I don't admit your charge against me, sir, I see that I am not in a position to assert myself, so I must yield," said Willis Wynkoop.

"That means that you will keep the secret of the presence in this country of the outfit to which this youth belongs?" asked the scout.

"I will, but—"

"But what?"

"That still leaves Ned Duncan and myself deadly foes."

"Ah, yes; I can well understand that he wants nothing to do with one of your kind," sternly replied Buffalo Bill, and the youth flinched under the aspersion.

But, Ned Duncan, wishing to smooth matters over, and content with the victory won by the scout, said:

"I thank you, Willis, for your promise, for it will prevent untold sorrow for my people and yours not to know that they have come to the same country to find enemies."

"They will find it out in some other way."

"They will not, unless you are the tale bearer, for I will see to it that you do not settle within many a long league of each other," averred the scout.

"I have said that I would not tell."

"Will you swear it? I must demand your oath, for I am suspicious of the mere promise of one who will stab in the back."

Again the unfortunate youth flushed under the scout's words.

"Now, sir, do you take your solemn oath, by all you hold dear on earth, and your hope of a hereafter, that you will not betray the secret that the Duncan outfit is in this country, or have left Kansas?"

"I do, yes," was the sullen response.

"It is well; and let me suggest that should you do otherwise you will find me hot on your trail, for the innocent shall not suffer through your hatred for this boy."

"Now I will go with you to your camp."

"For what purpose?"

"I am a Government officer, and my duty takes me there, for one reason, while another is to see that you are guided to a desirable place to settle, for I know this country well."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SCOUT ON HIS GUARD.

The scout at once set the youth free, and handed him the revolver he had dropped upon the ground, as well as his rifle.

The paper written and signed he took from the stake and put in his pocket, though Willis Wynkoop wanted it, while Ned Duncan told him to keep it, if he so thought proper.

"I intend to do just that. It is a proof of the duel agreed upon, and which I broke in upon—for reasons," answered Buffalo Bill.

"I will see you some time in the future, my young friend; and now let me suggest that you tell Lew Sykes, your guide, that you met me upon a scout, and I advised him to take you to the Valley of the Sweetwater toward Fort Fetterman."

"I will, sir."

"You will find good lands there for planting and grazing, excellent water, and be within easy ride of the fort if aid is needed."

"Yes, sir; and I hope we will see you in our new home sometime, for you will be most welcome."

"Thank you. I'll look in upon you sometime, for I scout this country from the Platte River to the Yellowstone."

"Good-by, and luck to you."

The scout and the boy warmly clasped hands, and then Ned started off toward his camp, Buffalo Bill calling out:

"You seem to be a good plainsman to find your way."

"Oh, yes; I am a Kansas boy, you know," was the answer.

Then Ned called to the scout and rode back toward him to whisper: "Watch Willis as you would a snake, since he can be so treacherous as he was toward me."

"I will keep my eye on him, never fear."

"But he is armed, as you are, and you are alone, you know."

"Yes, I'll be on my guard. Good-by!" and Buffalo Bill rejoined Willis, who remarked:

"Some plot against me, I suppose."

"No, only a word of warning."

The two youths had not spoken at parting, and as Willis Wynkoop and the scout looked back they saw Ned Duncan disappear from sight.

"Well, scout, I don't just recall the trail to camp, so as you know the country so well lead the way and I will follow," said Willis Wynkoop as he and Buffalo Bill rode along side by side.

The Scout smiled in a peculiar way and responded:

"Pard, I am too old a bird to be caught with chaff."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that I always keep a madman and a coward where I can keep my eye upon him."

"Do you mean that you are afraid of me?" sneered Wynkoop, while his face paled.

"Yes, have it so, if it pleases you, for I have had proof of what you can do behind the back of one who trusts you. We'll stick together, Boy Pard."

"Afraid of a boy?"

"No, of a gun, for I know their danger in the hands of a boy."

"We'll stick closer than brothers, so make no mistake, young fellow."

So the two rode along side by side, down by the side of the stream, which led through a narrow and rocky pass at the foot of the valley.

This pass led into a plain, and thence on to the valley in which the Wynkoop party had encamped over Sunday.

Across this plain Buffalo Bill had been following the trail of the wagon train, where he had seen the tracks of Willis Wynkoop's horse and followed them through the pass and along the fringe of timber until he had come upon the tragic scene which had so recently ended fatally for Ned Duncan.

As the scout had gone to the stream to allow his horse to drink, his return to the pass, accompanied by the youth, had been along the winding brook, thus taking him a much longer way than directly through the timber, in which Ned Duncan had disappeared after parting from the other two.

The trail through the pass was rocky, and on the side of a slope, while it was so narrow that the scout found it difficult to ride by the side of the youth.

Finding that they must go single file, the scout decided that he must force the youth to go ahead.

"Boy Pard, you take the lead here," he shouted.

"I don't know the way."

"The trail is plain enough though narrow, and it will only be for a hundred yards through this rocky pass. Go ahead, I say!" and as he spoke Buffalo Bill's horse slipped on the now very steep hill-side, slipped, lost his footing completely, and then rolled down the hill, with his rider.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BOY RESCUER.

The cry that burst from the lips of Willis Wynkoop at the downfall of Buffalo Bill's horse was loud, exultant and full of hatred.

He was upon treacherous footing himself, so moved his own horse to a safer spot, and then dismounted, grasping his rifle as he did so.

What his intention was his face revealed, it was so full of malignant determination to be avenged upon the scout.

The noble sorrel had appeared to fall heavily, and to the youth it looked as though he had rolled over his rider, dragging him with him the fifty feet down the steep slope to the stream that sped like a millrace through the rocks just there.

Seeking a spot where he could see Cody and his horse, both prostrate, the revengeful youth called out:

"Now, Buffalo Bill, it is my time!"

With the words he was bringing his rifle around, when suddenly, as though from the clouds, came the command:

"Drop that gun, Willis Wynkoop, and be quick about it!"

The intended assassin was fairly terror-stricken.

He could not have brought the rifle to his shoulder to save his life, at that moment.

He stood like one with palsy, trembling from head to foot.

His face was as pallid as a corpse, and his eyes were slowly raised until they rested upon the one who had checkmated him in his murderous intention.

He beheld Ned Duncan, and with his rifle resting over a rock the youth was aiming directly at him.

The weapon was ready to fire, the finger upon the trigger.

Fifty feet above him, upon the cliff, protected by the rock in his front, Ned Duncan held his enemy wholly at his mercy.

"Ha, young pard, you have taken him off my hands, and when he certainly had the drop on me," came unexpectedly from the scout, whom Willis Wynkoop had believed to be badly hurt.

"Are you hurt, Mr. Cody?" called out Ned Duncan from the cliff.

"A little, and shaken up considerably; but I'll soon pull myself together, while you keep your gun on that imp."

"I'll kill him if he moves," was the emphatic response.

There Willis Wynkoop stood, white-faced and trembling, and seemed to be dazed.

Buffalo Bill was lying by the side of his horse, the animal having obeyed his master's command not to rise, for the scout saw that he must hold him as a barrier for his expected duel with Wynkoop.

He had dropped his rifle in his fall, but had his revolver in his belt.

When the horse had rolled over him, fortunately the scout's form had been in a crevice of the rocks, and thus escaped being crushed or injured.

From there on the two had slipped down the steep slope to the edge of the stream.

The horse had been skinned on one side, but was not much the worse for his fall, while Buffalo Bill's head was slightly cut, the skin torn off of one hand, his clothes disarranged and he was shaken up considerably.

Rising from the slope, Buffalo Bill called to his horse to get up, and was delighted to see that the animal was not much the worse for his tumble.

The rifle lay near, where it had slipped

down the slope, and, picking it up, Buffalo Bill bathed his face and wounds in the brook, and did as much for the scratches on his horse, and then he led the roan down the rough bank to the end of the pass.

Here he left him and returned to the scene of his fall.

There stood Willis Wynkoop, yet pallid and the picture almost of despair.

On the cliff was his boy foe, covering him still with his rifle.

"Well, my young Imp of Hades, you overreached yourself that time, thanks to my Boy Pard, yonder," the scout remarked.

The youth made no reply.

"You were quick to take advantage of my fall, but not quick enough; you should have caught me on the fly as I was going down. Your intention was to kill me, and I owe it to Pard Ned up there that I am not toes up now.

"I'll trouble you for those weapons, for children must not be trusted with dangerous toys.

"I'll give them to you when we get in sight of your camp."

The scout then disarmed the boy, who asked in a faint tone:

"Are you going to tell on me?"

"No, I'll let you off once more."

"Thank you, oh thank you, sir!" and the youth brightened up.

"I spare you for the sake of others, not yourself," was the stern rejoinder of Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER IX.

NED'S DEADLY AIM.

Turning from the youth at his side, Buffalo Bill called out to Ned Duncan, who still kept his place upon the cliff, his rifle ready:

"Ho, young pard! How was it you happened to be up there to help me just when I was in such sad need of it?"

"I hardly know, sir, only I had a dread of some danger threatening you, and I rode along the ridge to see how far I could see you on your way.

"I left my horse and had just reached the cliff, where I could see out in the plain, when I saw your horse fall, and the act of Willis Wynkoop to kill you, so I chipped in."

"Good! and quickly canceled the favor you owed me.

"Well, my lad, we'll meet again some day, when I can tell you how much I appreciate what you did for me.

"Now we'll part again, and as I have clipped this young tiger's claws he'll be no longer dangerous.

"Good-by, once more, and remember that I am your friend for life."

"I feel proud, sir, to have the friendship of Buffalo Bill," and waving his hand Ned Duncan turned away.

But he took another position and from the cliff watched the scout make Willis Wynkoop mount his horse, which he led along the treacherous trail to where his own animal was waiting.

There the scout also mounted, after swinging the weapons of the youth to his own saddle horn and the two rode away side by side.

"Willis is not dangerous now," muttered Ned, and having watched the two until they reached the broad wagon trail, he turned and walked back along the ridge until he came to his own horse, which he mounted and rode back the way he had come.

A mile back along the ridge he came to an easy descent into a valley on his right, and in which, several miles away, were visible the ascending columns of smoke from a dozen camp-fires.

It was the camp of the Duncan wagon train, and the emigrants were building fires to cook the evening meal, for it was nearing sunset.

Returning by the same trail he had come, Ned Duncan was entering a heavy piece of timber when he heard a wild cry not far from him.

He recognized it as the shriek of a horse in agony, for he had heard the same cry several times before in his life on the frontier, and spurring forward he came upon an animal struggling madly along, a young girl in the saddle, while an enormous mountain lion clung to the hind quarters of the poor brute with claws and teeth!

Another instant and the savage brute would have dragged down the plunging animal, but reining his horse back on his haunches, Ned Duncan threw his rifle to his shoulder, and the flash and report followed.

Right between the eyes struck the leaden messenger, and the huge lion fell in a heap upon the ground, just as the young girl slipped from the saddle and dropping upon her knees thus remained, the whole scene forming a thrilling picture.

In an instant Ned Duncan had leaped from his horse, caught the trembling, terrified animal that had been in the clutches of the lion, and was bleeding freely from the wounds of claws and teeth, while he spoke soothingly to quiet its fright.

The girl watched the youth as he examined the wounds and did what he could to stanch the flow of blood, and rising from her knees she came toward him in a timid manner and silently held out her hand, her lips quivering and her eyes full of tears.

She was a girl of fifteen, with beautiful face and a form of rare grace, her riding habit and slouch hat being particularly becoming to her.

The youth appeared not to see the outstretched hand, as he busied himself with her horse, and said:

"If you will come I will lead him back to the stream yonder, and check the bleeding."

"I will gladly come; but will you not take my hand, Ned Duncan?"

"Do you offer it merely because you think you owe me your life, Miss Hilda?"

"I offer it because I do owe you my life, for you have saved me from a fearful death; but also to show you that I forgive you."

"You mean for killing your brother Ralph?" said the youth, with a voice that was low and pathetic.

"Yes, you were not the one to blame—I forgive you."

"Thank you, for as his sister you have much to forgive."

"Come."

He led her horse toward the brook he had crossed a few hundred yards back, and she followed, leading his.

She watched him as he bathed the wounds until they stopped bleeding, and then she asked, timidly:

"Why do I find you here, Ned Duncan, for I thought you were in Kansas?"

"Your seeing me here must be a secret between us two—you must promise that."

"You surely are not here to—"

"I know what you think—that I am here to kill some one of your people."

"No! oh no, no! I am not a murderer; but I came West with a party and have strayed from camp."

"Why are you so far from your camp, alone?"

"I came out with my brother, but

turned back, lost my way, and saw the smoke of our camp over yonder and was going to it when the lion attacked me."

"That is not your camp; but I will guide you to your people," was the reply.

CHAPTER X.

BACK TO THE CAMP.

The girl looked him squarely in the eyes now, and said:

"No, Ned Duncan, you must not go to our camp, for even after what you have done for me there are those there who would kill you."

"I will not go nearer than to show you the way, for remember, you are not to tell of this meeting, only report that you were attacked by the lion and escaped."

"You mean it?"

"I do, most certainly. You must promise me."

"I will."

"Then let me aid you to mount, for night will be here soon, and your horse will not be able to more than get you there, I fear, for it is several miles to your camp."

He raised her lightly to the saddle, and then led the way at a canter.

He saw that the movement of the horse caused the wounds to bleed afresh, though not as before, and he quickened his pace.

Just as darkness fell he came to the ridge where a few of the camp-fires were plainly seen, and then said:

"Now it is but a quarter of a mile to your camp; you see the fires and hear the dogs barking, so I will let you go on alone, but will wait to see that you arrive safely."

"Good-by, Miss Hilda."

"Good-by, Ned Duncan, and remember, I will never forget that I owe you my life, and—and—"

She held out her hand in silence. He willingly grasped it, and without a word the two so strangely met parted—he watching her until she disappeared in the gathering gloom.

After a brief time he heard a shout in a man's voice, then an answer in the clear tones of the girl, whose words Ned could distinctly hear, and he knew she meant he should hear, for she called out:

"I am safe! I got lost, and—"

He heard no more, for a loud cheer went up from all in the camp.

Then the brave boy rode back toward his own camp, arriving there just as the guide, Lew Sykes, was about to start out with others in search of him.

"It's a bad country ter be lost in, Boy Pard, and I was gittin' anxious about yer, though I does know you is a first-class plainsman," was Lew's greeting.

"I wasn't lost, Lew, only detained by a party I met."

"You met somebody in these lone diggins, young feller?" asked the guide in amazement.

"Sh—! I don't wish it known save to you. I'll tell you about it when I have had my supper, for I am as hungry as a mountain lion, and I have had reason in the last couple of hours to know just how hungry an animal of that kind can be."

"Boy Pard, you've had a lively time I'm thinkin', and I not with yer as I had oughter been."

"That's what I gets for playin' lazy and lyin' round camp listenin' ter Sunday Psalm singin' an' sich' when I sh'u'd hev been scoutin' 'round."

"Git yer supper, fer I'll look after yer hoss, and then we'll git out of earshot and have a powwow."

Lew Sykes had taken a great fancy to the brave lad, and had much to teach

him in "plains' ways," in the time they had been together, and found that he had a very apt pupil.

As Kansas at that time was on the "frontier," Ned Duncan from early boyhood had been amid Wild West scenes, and with the feud existing between the Duncan-Wynkoops, he had become matured beyond his years.

Acknowledged to be the deadliest shot and best horseman among his mates, he was also a bright fellow naturally, fond of books, had a taste for sketching, and was no mean performer upon the violin and guitar, while he could sing a song in a most creditable manner.

He was a hero among his comrades, as he had brought down big game, buffalo, deer, bear and wolves in great number; and then, too, he had a record which he shrunk from in having killed Ralph Wynkoop, the elder brother of Willis. Likewise, he had come out best in more than one scrimmage with outlaws and stock thieves.

He ate supper at his tent, his mother having kept it warm for him, and the while he was very thoughtful though hungry.

The meal over he made a detour to escape the evening Sunday service in camp, and went to look up Lew Sykes.

He soon found him, and as men, women and children were all at the gathering about the camp-fire, singing Psalms, it was not likely the two would be interrupted in their talk, especially as the guide led the way to a spot some distance away.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SCOUT AND THE KANSAS KID.

"You've got something to chin to me, Boy Pard, that I sees very plain," said the guide as the two sat down upon a rock in an open space near where the horses of the outfit were feeding.

Lew Sykes was a bronzed-face man of large size, with a full beard and long hair, while he had the catlike movements of an Indian.

He was dressed in buckskin, wore moccasins, and a very wide-brimmed slouch hat.

That he was a man of nerve and self-confidence a glance into his fine, honest face revealed.

He had been a pathfinder westward for years, and was known as a man to be relied upon.

Some said he had learned the country hunting for gold, but whatever had been his means he still clung to guiding, and was much sought after and well paid for his services.

"I have got something to tell you, Lew."

"You know Buffalo Bill, I have heard you say?" said Ned.

"Know him? Well, I do, and I'm proud of the acquaintance, for a better man than Buffalo Bill don't live."

"Has you seen him, for its likely, as he's Chief of Scouts at Fetterman, and jist liable to be scouting 'round here?"

"Yes. I met him to-day."

"Lordy, why warn't I with yer, for it does me good ter meet Chief Cody."

"Why didn't he come to camp with you, or was he upon a secret trail?"

"Lew, I've got to let you into a secret."

"Say it quick."

"I want your promise to keep it a secret."

"Thar's my grip on it I will," and the guide wrung Ned's hand until he winced, for he had a grip of iron.

"You have heard that we moved from Kansas on account of a fatal feud we had there?"

"I has."

"You know too that we did not run away from our foes from fear, but from a duty the older 'heads determined to show toward the women and children."

"Them as knows this Duncan outfit must pass if they is lookin' fer cowards among 'em."

"Well, the other are also fearless; but unfortunately they recently decided to leave Kansas, as we did, and what is more they are now camped over Sunday not many miles from here, and were on a trail to lead them to the country we are heading for."

"The dickens yer say, Kid!"

"Why that are a cryin' shame."

"Now for our people to meet that outfit would mean a deadly fight."

"Sure."

"They have one of their people to avenge—"

"Yes, the one you kilt."

"Yes, and they would attack us."

"Sartin."

"For us to settle anywhere within a couple of days' journey of each other would mean discovery sooner or later, and bring on another feud out here in a lawless country."

"That so."

"Now I discovered their camp to-day, and fortunately recognized who they were before they saw me."

"So I pulled out."

"Big head you've got, my Kansas Kid."

"Later, I met Buffalo Bill, and we had a long talk together, for when he let me know who he was I knew I could trust him and told him what I am now telling you."

"He's the man ter give you a good talk as ter what were best."

"That is what he did do, for he said he would go to the other camp and guide them upon the head waters of the Sweetwater, which he told me was a lively country; while I was to tell you to guide us up to a fine country within a day's ride of Fort Fetterman, which he said you knew well."

"I do, and there you go to settle, though I was pushing for the Sweetwater country; but Buffalo Bill knows best; and his say goes with me."

"I am glad to hear you say this, Pard Lew."

"Don't mention it, Kansas Kid."

"I feel now that we won't meet the Wynkoops."

"Yer don't want ter; but hain't they got a guide?"

"Yes, a man by the name of Jerome Scott."

"I know him, and I don't take much stock in him."

"Yer see he were under a cloud from havin' lived among ther Shoshone redskins and had an Injun wife."

"If he hain't tricky, then I'm mistaken."

"Buffalo Bill said he also knew him."

"That settles it then, fer the outfit goes whar Buffalo Bill guides it."

"Strange we didn't know them folks was so near along with us, and all come from Kansas, too."

"They have just kept further off than you or any of us have strayed."

"That's so, Kansas Kid."

"But what more did Buffalo Bill say?"

"We had quite a talk together, and I was glad to be with him, for he is so calm in manner, so brave-looking, and he gives you confidence in him at a glance," and Ned was very careful not to betray by a slip of the tongue that he had met Willis Wynkoop, and what had followed that meeting.

That affair must be kept a secret.

After a short pause in the conversation, Ned Duncan said:

"Now, Pard Lew, I've got something else to tell you."

"Out with it, Kid."

"I have met one of the Wynkoop outfit to-day."

"Then the jig's up!" was Lew Sykes' vehement reply.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GUIDE'S STORY.

Ned Duncan smiled at the vehemence of Lew Sykes the Guide, in feeling that all was up, if he had met one of the Wynkoop party, and replied:

"No, Lew, it was a woman."

"So much the worse, fer a woman has got ter tell all she knows, unless it is ag'in' herself, and then she's as silent as moonrise."

"I'll tell you about it, Lew."

"It was the sister of Ralph Wynkoop, whom I killed."

"That settles it, fer women is more revengeful than men is, when they gits on ther rampage."

The youth smiled at the criticisms of the guide about the fair sex, and said:

"You must have had a sad experience, Pard Lew, with women."

Instantly the man's manner changed, and no longer talking in the drawling dialect of the border, he said fiercely:

"I have, boy, I have!"

"A woman was my ruin and drove me to what I am."

"Why, I was born a gentleman, rich, was educated and expected to hold an honorable position in life."

"But when I was your age I fell in love, like a fool, with a she devil in the guise of an angel."

"She was after my money, was my senior by a couple of years, was engaged to another man whom she loved, and the plot was to have her marry me and her lover kill me on the way home from the wedding."

"She as my wife would inherit my fortune, which I was, by a certain clause in the will, to get when I was eighteen."

"But his rifle snapped, as he had me covered, and seizing a revolver I always carried in the carriage, I fired upon him just as he pulled trigger a second time."

"Boy, my shot brought him down, and his shot pierced the heart of the woman, my wife."

"He was not dead, but dying, and driven to despair by remorse, he confessed all."

"I had them buried side by side, then I became ill, and for months lay between life and death."

"Recovering, I went to Europe, but I hated men and women, and wishing solitude returned to the United States via eastern lands, and crossing the continent halted in the Wild West."

"Here I have been ever since, and my house in Maryland is closed, my estate in an agent's hands, and here I remain and am content with my life."

"Now you know my story, Kansas Kid."

Not a word of consolation did Ned offer, but he silently pressed the hand of the guide.

That meant more than words.

Then, as though he had not heard the strange outburst of the guide, he continued:

"This girl left her camp for a ride, got lost, saw the smoke of our fires and thought it was their encampment, so came this way."

"As she entered some timber a huge mountain lion sprang upon her horse, and fortunately I was near and shot him."

"She recognized me as I did her, and I took her to within a short distance of her camp and left her.

"She knows what would follow the discovery of our people near her own, and gladly will she keep the secret, merely reporting that she escaped the brute after he had severely wounded her horse.

"But I want that mountain lion's skin, Pard Lew, for I never shot one of these animals before, and he's a dandy in size, I can tell you."

"We'll saddle up and go after him, Kid, fer ther skin is wu'th havin'," said the guide in his quiet way once more.

"All right, we can get away while they are all singing; but do you know, Pard Lew, I saw Indian signs to-day."

"Yer did?"

"Yes, several trails."

"All right. As this is a good camp, I'll just ask yer father ter halt here another day and let me scout around a bit, while we keep a good watch to-night."

The guide and Ned then saddled two horses, put a pack saddle on a third, and started after the lion.

Ned made no mistake in leading the way there, and an hour after the huge beast was in camp and all the people gathered around it and praising the youth for his deadly aim.

"Right atween ther eyes, he got him, yer see."

"Few dead-shots c'u'd do that and a life at stake," said the guide admiringly.

Then he called the "Doctor-Captain"—as he called Mr. Duncan, who was a physician and the leader of the party as well—to one side, and told him that it was best to remain encamped where they were for another day, as he had reason to fear Indians were about, and also he had concluded that it would be best to lead the train to another part of the country, within call of Fort Fetterman, and where they would be even better located than in their first choice which he had told them of.

Captain Duncan always yielded to his guide, in whom he had implicit confidence, and so the people were told another day's rest would be given them.

Guards were then stationed, and sleeping upon their arms the train people retired for the night, Ned Duncan lying awake to think over the strange happenings of the day in which he had played so important a part.

CHAPTER XIII.

GUARDING AGAINST TREACHERY.

When Buffalo Bill rode on with Willis Wynkoop, who might really be called his prisoner, he had little to say to him at first.

But the youth was determined that the scout should have his side of the story of the feud, and know his personal opinion of all of the Duncan outfit.

So he ran on from one thing to another, making the Duncans the blackest of the black, and lauding the Wynkoops up to the skies.

Buffalo Bill took it all in, and often knew from his own personal knowledge that the boy was dodging the truth to a very alarming extent.

He made out that the death of his brother Ralph at the hands of Ned Duncan had been a deliberate murder, and in every affair of a fatal kind the Wynkoops had been right, the Duncans wrong.

At last Buffalo Bill said in his dry way:

"Of course belonged to the Free State Party, and my father was killed by the Slavery Party, but truth and justice are

not to be denied, and though my sympathy is with your people in politics, I am confident that they have been in the wrong in this whole feud, for I know more about this matter than you think, being from Kansas myself, and I have jotted down as you were talking a number of statements that can be branded as lies, young fellow.

"But we will not quarrel, for it must go in camp that we are supposed friends."

"You'll never be my friend."

"No, not after what I know of you; but you are under an oath to me, and I'll see that you keep it, or I'll tell just what you are."

"And do you expect my father will be governed by you, in making a home for his people, when he has a guide along in whom he has thorough confidence?" sneered Willis Wynkoop.

"I know that he will, for I have proof of who I am, and more, I have not the confidence in your guide that you have."

"If you value your life you had better not pick a quarrel with Jerome Scott."

"He is no man to fool with, or back down even from you, Buffalo Bill."

"So I have heard."

"But I know my duty and shall do it," replied the scout.

"I will be pleased to see you tackle Jerome Scott."

"More pleased, doubtless, than he will be; but I am just off of a scout to the northwest, and I have made discoveries that I shall place before your father, Major Wynkoop, who is an old army officer, I have heard, and, as the leader of the outfit, must be made aware of what is before him."

"How far off is your camp?"

"If you expect to turn my father against Jerome Scott, his trusted guide, you will be mistaken."

"I asked you how far off your camp is from here?"

"About half a mile, I take it."

"Then I will hand your weapons over; but let me warn you right now, that if you attempt any trickery with me, I'll shoot you dead in your camp, for you are no more to be trusted than a coyote, I have found."

The face of the youth paled at this threat, and he said, somewhat warmly:

"You have my pledge, Mr. Cody, that I would not betray the secret of that Duncan kid, and I have no idea of getting into trouble with you when we reach camp."

"I have only warned you that my father has confidence in his guide, and justly so, and you cannot shake that confidence, and had better not try."

"I shall do no more than my duty," calmly rejoined the scout, and soon after he halted, took the belt of arms hanging to his saddle horn, and handed it to the youth.

Willis Wynkoop buckled the belt about his waist, as though glad to get his weapons back again, and held out his hand for the rifle.

This Buffalo Bill handed to him, the muzzle toward him.

By a quick, but seemingly unintentional movement, the youth threw the gun across his saddle, the muzzle toward the scout.

Buffalo Bill's quick eye detected this act, and, placing his hand firmly upon the shoulder of the youth, while he drew both horses to a halt, he said in a tone not to be mistaken:

"Sling that rifle behind your back, sir!"

It was done in very great haste.

The boy knew that he had been detected, and he was cowed by the burning gaze the scout turned upon him.

It had been in his mind, as the scout read, to kill Buffalo Bill, and riding on to camp say that it was an accident.

On their way then they went. The camp soon came into view, and there was a shout from the people as the two rode up, for Willis Wynkoop was popular with many there, and then some of the emigrants recognized the great scout, having met him in Kansas.

With well-feigned pleasure Willis Wynkoop called out:

"I met Buffalo Bill on the trail, and brought him to camp with me."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE WYNKOOP CAMP.

A loud cheer greeted the words of Willis Wynkoop, that he had brought back with him the great scout, Buffalo Bill, and those who had known him in Kansas crowded around to grasp his hand.

The horses were led away by the negro cook of Major Wynkoop, and the youth conducted the scout to the quarters of his father.

That gentleman had been taking an afternoon nap, but quickly advanced to meet the scout.

He was a tall, soldierly looking man of fifty-five, with a stern, sad face, and courtly manners.

"I have heard much of you, Mr. Cody, and assure you I am delighted to meet you now, for we have many mutual friends in the army, for I am an ex-officer, you know, resigning years ago on account of my family and friends getting into trouble in Kansas, which you may have heard of."

"Yes, Major Wynkoop, I know much of the Duncan-Wynkoop feud, and regret that it existed."

"I also know of your gallant record in the army, and, as you say, we have many friends and interests in common."

"You are stationed at Fort Fetterman, I believe, and are Chief of Scouts?"

"Yes, sir, and am just now on a scout, but, meeting your son, accompanied him to camp, for I was on your trail, wishing to see who was pushing so bravely up into this country."

"I am glad that you have come; but we have a most competent guide, and he is taking us to a land flowing with milk and honey, to judge from his description."

"You may know him, Mr. Cody, for his name is Jerome Scott."

"I know much of him, sir, and have met him."

"Did you get him in Kansas?"

"Yes, he was there on a visit, and we were fortunate to secure his services."

"Is he now in camp, Major Wynkoop?"

"No, he went off on a scout at daylight this morning, for we rest on the Sabbath day, you know, and said he would not return until in the night."

"He seemed anxious to have a lookout well ahead."

"He is wise, sir; you have given up your homes in Kansas, then?"

"Yes, altogether," and the major spoke sadly.

After a moment he added:

"You must know, Cody, that the Wynkoop-Duncan vendetta was a feud that must end, and should have ended long before."

"You understand, for I know how your family suffered, how brother turned against brother in the Kansas war, and how many death scenes followed."

"Where the blame lies for the beginning we will not discuss, for we of this generation were not the guilty ones, but those who went before."

"Still, the feud was begun and cruelly

kept up, and many a gallant life was sacrificed upon each side.

"Those of my name were the greatest sufferers, and my father, my brothers, and my eldest son have fallen victims.

"To remain in Kansas was for the red work to continue, death of noble boys to follow, or imprisonment to be the end, perhaps death on the gallows.

"So I decided to act for the good of all.

"No man could call me a coward with justice, so I took the move, arranged our plans satisfactorily to all, worked secretly, and when all were ready we pulled out one night on our march out to this country.

"Fortunately, I met with Jerome Scott, and here we are.

"I left the Duncan clan behind, and the death of my son Ralph, and one other unavenged; but so let it be, for here we will forget the bitter past, and live hopeful in the future."

Buffalo Bill had listened with deep interest to all the strong man had said.

His wife was there, and tears rolled down her cheeks.

His son sat there, and upon his young, sinister face was a sneer.

The father saw it, and said:

"In my son Willis here, I had strong opposition to leaving.

"He was devoted to his brother Ralph, and wished to avenge him, especially as his slayer was a youth about his own age; but, poor boy, he was not the one to blame, as my son had forced the duel upon him.

"He is a fine fellow, I have heard, and though Ralph's blood is upon his hands, he acted only in self-defense, and, to be just, I cannot wish that his fate may be the same."

"No, poor Ralph was the one to blame, though a sorrowing mother says it," sadly remarked Mrs. Wynkoop.

Buffalo Bill cast a quick glance at Willis, but his head was turned, and he would not meet the scout's eye.

With such parents as those, Buffalo Bill knew that justice would be done, and wondered that their son was such as he was.

So the time passed on until evening came, and the scout had his supper with the major and his wife, for he had said that he wished to have a talk with him later, and he decided to have Willis Wynkoop present.

Then for the first time it was recalled that Hilda Wynkoop had gone with her brother in the morning, and he was asked where she was.

"Why, Hilda soon left me to return to camp," was the startling reply, and at once the whole camp was a scene of excitement.

CHAPTER XV.

HILDA'S RETURN.

Buffalo Bill at once sprung to his feet, at the startling intelligence that Hilda Wynkoop had not been seen since she left the camp in the morning with her brother.

He gazed out into the darkness, and his sympathy went out to the poor girl who must then be wandering lost in the wilds, perhaps was even then dead.

"Where did you part with your sister, sir?" he asked, with a sternness that was called up by his knowledge of Willis Wynkoop, and he bent his piercing eyes upon the youth.

"Several miles from camp, sir, when she said she would return."

"And why?"

"Well, she got angry with me because I shot a fawn, and said she would go no further."

"When was this?"

"Shortly before noon."

"And you allowed her to return alone?"

"She said she could follow the trail back again."

"I consider your act criminal," was the angry rejoinder of Buffalo Bill, and the major and his wife had the same thought.

Then Buffalo Bill said:

"Major Wynkoop, it is a forlorn hope to hunt for her to-night, but I will start at once, with three men you select to accompany me, and this young man must guide us to the spot where he parted company with his sister.

"From there, at the first glimpse of light, we will start upon her trail."

This proposition of the scout was received with the warmest thanks, and preparations for the start were being made when a shout came from the further end of the camp, and the voice of Hilda Wynkoop was heard.

The shouts that then went up on all sides told how glad all were of the return of the girl, whom all loved most dearly, and who was known as the "Angel of the Outfit," for the kind deeds of Hilda had been felt by all.

A few moments after the young girl rode up to her father's tent, and the bright camp-fire light fell full upon her wounded and bloodstained horse.

"Oh, my child!"

"What have you not suffered?" cried Mrs. Wynkoop, as she drew Hilda to her arms.

Buffalo Bill had at once stepped to the trembling horse, and a glance showed him what had happened, for he said:

"A mountain lion has attacked her, and how she escaped, Heaven only knows."

"Yes, that gentleman is right, for a mountain lion sprung upon poor Birdwing and nearly dragged him down; but I got away, I got away—that is all I can tell you, save that I missed the trail after leaving Willis, and lost my way."

"Don't let me talk of it, for I can tell no more."

Mrs. Wynkoop led her into the tent, but the girl turned and asked, addressing the scout:

"Will Birdwing live, sir?"

"I will do what I can, miss, to save him," was the reply.

Willis Wynkoop had taken the saddle off the horse, and under it he had found a large white silk handkerchief, folded as a pad to keep the saddle from touching a deep cut from the lion's claw.

He regarded the handkerchief in a strange way, wrung the water out of it, and thrust it into his pocket.

In the mean time Buffalo Bill had called for a needle and thread, and quickly sewed the gaping wounds up, after which he bathed them with arnica and covered them with adhesive plaster.

The horse was then given a good rubbing down, a warm mash, and blanketed, and the scout said:

"I believe he will come around all right."

Hilda had been given her supper, and seemed to have recovered her usual spirits, but she did not wish to speak of her terrible adventure, and no one questioned her further upon the subject, seeing that it was painful to her.

But Hilda was not anxious to say more than she had to.

She saw that Buffalo Bill, to whom she had been presented by her father, had his own ideas of her escape from the mountain lion, and the least she said about the affair the better.

She did not know what to say and not

betray the secret of who had been her rescuer.

The scout, without appearing to do so, regarded her closely.

His own experience with the savage beasts known as the "Monarch of the Mountains" told him that Hilda Wynkoop had not escaped unaided from an animal that had sprung upon the back of her horse, wounding him as he had with claws and teeth.

With a brute of such weight clinging to him a horse would be dragged down.

And yet a weak girl had escaped, and after her horse had certainly been terribly hurt.

All the rest in camp saw Hilda's story as she wished them to, that the lion had sprung upon the back of Birdwing, had been thrown off, and the fleet animal had sped on and saved his fair rider.

But Buffalo Bill saw it differently, knew that it was a very strange story, and wondered how Hilda had found her way to camp at night, when she could not do so by day.

And another also doubted her story, but he had a good reason for doing so—a large silk handkerchief, in the centre of which was embroidered in red letters the name of "Ned Duncan."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TELL-TALE HANDKERCHIEF.

While the party sat about the tent of Major Wynkoop, Hilda saw that her brother was nervously glancing at her and anxious to speak to her.

He gave her signal after signal that he wished her to leave the circle, and at last she did so.

She went to the tent occupied by her mother and herself, and thither Willis Wynkoop soon came also.

His face was pale, and a fierce light gleamed in his eyes, as he sat down upon one of the two seats in the very comfortable tent.

"What is it, Willis, for you have been making more signs than a signal station the last half hour?" she said, somewhat petulantly.

"I wished to speak to you alone."

"Well, here I am and there you are."

"Don't be so uppish."

"I suppose you wished to ask my pardon for deserting me this morning as you did, and which so nearly ended in my meeting a horrible death?"

"No, you got angry because I shot a fawn, and said you could find your way back to camp."

"And here I am."

"Yes, eight or ten hours after leaving me."

"What have you to say to me, Willis, for I was enjoying the conversation of that dashing, handsome scout, Buffalo Bill, of whom I have heard so much."

"Isn't he just splendid?"

"I despise him."

"No doubt, for I believe you lost, and he had to guide you to camp."

"It is a lie."

"I met him, and he came along at my invitation."

"Because you didn't know the way?"

"Curse it, no!"

"Why are you always picking at me, Hilda?"

"I am not."

"I was once as meek as that poor little fawn you killed, until I saw that you were riding over me rough-shod, and then I asserted myself."

"I love you, brother, but I do not admire your tyrannical manner with mother and myself, yes, and with all who will allow you to be so, and I, for one, will no longer submit to it."

"Now, what is it you wish in having

me come here, for I desire to go back to father's tent and listen to Mr. Cody talk."

"I wish to ask you a question."

"Won't to-morrow do?"

"No."

"What is it, then?"

"Where have you been all day?"

"Lost in this wilderness."

"Had you no motive in leaving me this morning?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"To get rid of your temper and ill-natured company."

"Nothing else?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"To return to camp."

"Why did you not do so?"

"I am here."

"Why did you not return this morning?"

"I lost my way."

"Or had an appointment?"

"What do you mean?"

"Did you not ride out with me to purposely leave me and return alone, that you might meet some one?"

"Whom could I meet?"

"The one you did."

"Ugh! the mountain lion?"

"Don't refer to that brute, or I'll faint," and Hilda shivered.

"It was not only the mountain lion that you met, Hilda Wynkoop."

The girl started, and her face paled.

What did her brother know?

He had only come into camp late.

The scout had seemed to doubt her story, she felt sure.

Had her brother and the scout discovered the secret she was to keep?

With these thoughts flashing in her mind, Hilda decided to go slow and make no admissions.

She knew her brother's savage temper, and she felt how revengeful he was toward Ned Duncan.

So she said:

"Will you please tell me what you are driving at, Willis Wynkoop?"

"You know."

"How should I?"

"You met some one to-day."

"I met the monarch of the mountains, yes, and poor Birdwing will never forget it any more than I will."

"You had an appointment to meet some one else."

"Willis Wynkoop, it is false, and you know it."

"There is not a man, or boy, either, that I would meet in this camp without the sanction of my father or mother, and you know I am not deceitful."

"Don't be a fool, as well as a tyrant, brother."

"It was to meet one not from this camp you went riding this morning."

"That is also false!" was the indignant reply, and then, with a laugh, she added:

"Now, you must be losing your mind, for who on earth could I meet in a howling wilderness?"

"Our worst foe, one whom I shall one day kill, to avenge poor Ralph, that young imp of satan, Ned Duncan," savagely hissed the youth.

"Brother Willis, I will call father to you, for you accuse me of going out to meet the slayer of my brother, one whom you know we left Kansas to avoid."

"Willis Wynkoop, have you lost your mind, gone mad?"

"You know, as well as I do, that the Duncan gang are not far away, that they ran away from Kansas because they were afraid of us, and as ill luck would have it, have come to settle in this country."

"Do you know this?"

"I do."

"Does father, or any one else?"

"No, no one but you."

"And why do you say that I know?"

"You could not have escaped alone from that mountain lion, and some one aided you."

"Well?"

"That some one was none other than Ned Duncan, Ralph's assassin."

"For shame! you know he was no assassin, Willis, whatever he may have done."

"You met him to-day."

"What proof have you of this?"

"This silk handkerchief bearing his name."

"Ah! let me see it?"

"I will not."

"But it is proof that you met Ned Duncan to-day."

CHAPTER XVII.

A SECRET STILL.

Hilda Wynkoop felt that she was cornered.

Her pledge to Ned Duncan to keep secret the presence of his party there would be of no avail.

Her brother knew of the proximity of the Duncans to their own camp.

How would this knowledge be used?

How would this strange meeting in the wilds of the west terminate?

At last, feeling herself at bay, the young girl determined to tell nothing she did not have to, and at the same time to try and find out all that her brother knew.

The production of the handkerchief stunned her.

She recalled that Ned Duncan had taken it from about his neck, had bathed the wounds of the horse with it, and then had folded it up and placed it over the bad cut under the edge of the saddle, intending to take it out when she got near camp.

This he had forgotten to do.

The handkerchief had betrayed the secret.

"Where did you get that handkerchief, brother?" asked Hilda, in the most casual manner.

"Under your saddle, where he put it with an affected humanity, to show off his tender heart to you, when his hands are stained with the blood of poor Ralph."

"Did he tell you all this was his motive?"

"No, but I knew it."

"Mind reader, eh?"

"I wish to know where you met him."

"I will tell you."

"I want the whole truth."

"Willis Wynkoop, do not judge me from your standpoint, if I am your sister."

"I would scorn to lie, or to do an act I knew to be dishonorable or mean."

"Tell me where you met Ned Duncan, the brute."

"No, the slayer of Brother Ralph, yes, but who has canceled that act by saving my life."

"No romancing now for effect."

"You have seen Birdwing."

"You have said that I could not have escaped unaided from the mountain lion."

"Yes, I know it."

"Then I tell you that Ned Duncan saved me."

"Bah!"

"You do not believe me."

"Some one else did."

"It is some one else now; but I'll tell you that I was lost, through your act, because you know that you rode away

from me and told me to go back to camp alone."

"I did not tell this to father and mother, but you know that if I had been killed my life would have been on your head."

"That I did not go to meet any one you have proof of, as you left me alone, hid from me, and called to me to hurry back on the trail, or the wolves would eat me."

"Hunting for you, I lost our trail out, and so I wandered all the afternoon."

"I at last saw some smoke a long way off, and felt sure it came from our camp."

"While riding in that direction the lion sprung upon Birdwing's back."

"The poor creature plunged forward, and I tried to shoot the beast with my revolver, but each cap snapped—I had not loaded the weapon, but I have learned a lesson and will know better next time."

"I saw that my horse was falling, that he would soon be dragged down, and my end follow."

"Oh, God, Willis! the horror of that moment."

"But a foe was near to save me."

"I heard a sharp report, and a bullet sunk into the lion's brain."

"Ned Duncan had given a life in return for the one he had taken, for he it was."

"He came up, and the recognition was startling and mutual."

"It was the camp of his people toward which I had been riding."

"They, too, had fled from the appalling doom of the vendetta to this wild land."

"He came with me to within sight of our camp-fires, after he had done all he could for poor Birdwing."

"He wished me to keep secret that he had rescued me, and so let no one know in our camp that their hated foes, the Duncans, were near."

"He said that our paths would divide if no one knew."

"Now you have all the story I have to tell; but I know that you were aware that Ned Duncan was near ere you found that handkerchief."

"Did he tell you?"

"Not a word, but you betrayed yourself."

"Now, brother Willis, shall you tell this secret, or will you keep silent and thus let no more lives be taken?"

"I beg you, by all you love in this world, or hold sacred, not to tell this secret, for death will follow the knowledge, and upon your head will rest the responsibility."

"Don't preach, for I will not tell the secret."

"I did see Ned Duncan this morning, and we agreed to remain silent about our meeting."

"Thank God! but father is calling you."

He rose quickly and left the tent.

He had left the handkerchief; it caught Hilda's eyes as it lay upon the cot, and in an instant she had seized and hidden it.

But the compact of silence was to be kept, for her brother had told her so, and she was happy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DENOUNCED.

Major Wynkoop had called his son, as the scout said it was getting late, and he wished to have the talk he had referred to some time before with Willis and his father.

The people in camp had been passing the evening in religious services and singing, and one by one they had gone to their canvas quarters for the night.

Willis approached at his father's call, and Mrs. Wynkoop bade the scout good-night, and went to her own tent, where Hilda awaited her.

But the latter ran over to say good-night to Buffalo Bill and her father.

As she turned to her brother she whispered:

"Remember, the secret must be kept, or on your head be the result."

"I'm no fool," was the ill-natured reply, but Hilda did not of course understand all that the remark implied, not knowing that Willis Wynkoop was under Buffalo Bill's eye, and dared not betray what he so longed to do.

When alone in the tent, Major Wynkoop and the scout lighted their pipes and took easy camp-chairs, while Willis, looking ill at ease and pale, sat on one of the cots in the shadow.

"Well, Cody, I must say that I have much to thank you for, besides a very pleasant evening."

"You are to sleep in the tent here with us, you know, for my son and I have it in common."

"No, thank you, major; I will spread my blankets near my horse, and I have a very comfortable outfit, while you know I am nine nights in ten with the skies only as a roof."

"But I wish to ask you about your guide?"

"Yes, a fine fellow."

"We had two, but one died, and he too was a good fellow."

"What was the matter with him?"

"I don't know; but he acted as though he had been poisoned by some wild fruit he had eaten, and died suddenly."

"What was his name?"

"Dick Denny."

"I knew him, and he was a fine fellow."

"Where was Jerome Scott?"

"He was with him, and nursed him like a brother."

"It was a severe blow to him."

"You say, son, that you have every confidence in Jerome?"

"I have, indeed."

"Has he been ahead of the train much of late, sir?"

"Only the last few days."

"He seemed to be very cautious not to be led into a trap, for this is the country in which to look for Indians, you know, Cody."

"Yes, sir, I know."

"And it is the country to shun unless you wholly know your guide, for, large as your party is, if led into an ambush, a few hundred Indians could soon destroy you."

"True."

"But I have seventy-seven fighting men, all told, and a few boys and a number of the women who know how to use firearms well. My wife and daughter, for instance."

"Why, give us any notice of danger, and we can build a fort, and have provisions to stand a two months' siege."

"Yes, sir, but, led into an ambush, and half of your people would fall at the first fire, your cattle would be stampeded, and the whole outfit destroyed, for the people of the Mountain Meadow Massacre were just so trapped, and they had a larger force than you."

"You draw a doleful picture, Cody."

"I draw a true one that might be, sir."

"Come, you have some motive in this, for twice you spoke of our being led into an ambush."

"Major Wynkoop, you are right."

"I have a motive, and though you will not like what I say, perhaps, I can only stake my name and reputation against that of the one I accuse, and let you be the judge."

"In heaven's name, what do you mean, Cody, for you know all I love and hold dear is here?"

"Yes, sir, and therefore I shall speak, and more, I hold myself responsible for my words."

"Speak out, for God's sake."

"I told you, sir, that I did not like nor trust your guide."

"Why, Cody?"

"It is true, sir."

"Come, come, Cody, are you going to let some prejudice you may have against poor Jerome Scott cause you to make me believe he is other than he should be?"

"Has he reported to you of late that you are moving right upon a large band in waiting for you?"

"No, but can such be the case?"

"It is, as I happen to know."

"Well, well, he is out ahead now, and he will doubtless so report when he comes in to-night."

Buffalo Bill smiled in a significant way.

"You do not believe that he will?"

"I know that he will not."

"Wait and see."

"But now tell me what discovery you have made."

"You know I told you I was on a scout?"

"Yes."

"I have been ahead of you all and I found a force of five hundred Shoshone braves camped in the Sunshine Pass, where half as many warriors in hiding could wipe out a whole regiment of soldiers."

"They did not see me, and I came down the valley to the left of this one."

"I was crossing this valley on my way to the fort, when I came upon your trail, and was following it when I met your son."

"I wished to see what wagon train was trailing this way, and to warn you of danger."

"But my guide, Cody?"

"He has lived for years among the Indians, has a squaw wife, the sister of the Head Chief, and is believed by the scouts and soldiers to be a renegade."

"I, for one, Major Wynkoop, denounce him as a traitor to his race, and I shall prove him so to be."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GUIDE.

There was no doubting the words of Buffalo Bill in his denunciation of Jerome Scott, the guide of the Wynkoop train.

He meant just what he said, and Major Wynkoop looked aghast at the direct charge of infamy.

Willis Wynkoop glanced at his father, and, seeing that he was really impressed by the scout's charge, said, in a meaning tone:

"Perhaps you could guide the train in safety, Scout Cody?"

"I am here to do so."

"That puts poor Jerome out of a job, and you into his shoes."

"My son!" said the major sternly, while Buffalo Bill, looking the youth squarely in the face, replied:

"I pardon you, young man, as you are ignorant and have much to learn, or you would never accuse a Government officer of seeking pay from other than a legitimate source."

"My duty is to protect the settlers in this country from just such renegades as is Jerome Scott."

"I know that Indians are ambushed in your path, and I'll stake my life that your guide has gone where they are to have them know of your coming."

"I shall await his return to-night,

boldly accuse him of treachery, and make him prisoner, while I guide your train, Major Wynkoop, to a most delightful valley in which to settle, and where you will be within call of Fort Aspen, should the occasion demand aid."

"I thank you, Cody, and you must pardon my hot-headed boy, for he does not know you as I do," said the major.

"We are destined to become better acquainted, sir," and the boy flinched under the words, for he understood them as they were meant by the scout.

"Father, will you allow poor Jerome to be arrested in this way?" urged Willis Wynkoop, hotly.

"Mr. Cody, as he says, is a Government officer, and he has to shoulder the responsibility of his act if he is wrong."

"And I will."

"But how do we know that this is Buffalo Bill?"

"You forget, my son, that there are a score of people in camp who know him personally."

"They do not know that he is still in the service, for he may have been discharged, and there may be spite in what he does."

"Willis!" said the major sternly.

"I am surprised at you!"

"Keep silence, sir!"

"I do not mind him, sir," said Buffalo Bill, calmly.

"I will say no more, but, father, you are making a grave mistake."

"I will leave you."

"One moment, sir!"

Buffalo Bill placed himself squarely before the youth, and said, sternly:

"Major Wynkoop, this young man is making a mistake, for he intends to warn Jerome Scott of my presence here, and that will give him a chance to escape."

"If you dare do such a thing as that, Willis, son of mine though you be, I will banish you from our midst."

"I do not believe in the guilt of Jerome, but I know Cody, and he makes a charge he must substantiate, or take the consequences; but we have too much at stake not to be governed by him, and he shall have his way."

"I thank you, sir."

"It will save your people from destruction, mark my words, for Jerome is leading you into an ambush."

"But it is late, and I will go to my blankets, only the guide must not know of my presence here, and in the morning I will arrest him."

Again declining the invitation of the major to share his tent, and urging him not to allow his son to warn the guide, Buffalo Bill walked over to where his horse was staked out, got his camping outfit from his saddle, and, spreading his blankets, was soon fast asleep.

In the mean time, there was an angry scene between father and son, before they retired; but at last the lamp was put out in the tent, and both appeared to be soon wrapped in deep slumber.

But after a few minutes a form rose from one cot, crept out of the tent, and, pulling on his boots outside, walked quietly through the camp toward a group of wagons.

Here he found a guard, and asked him if the guide had returned.

"Not yet," said the man on watch, half asleep, and not even knowing who had spoken to him.

Going over to the spot where the horses were staked out, the youth, for he it was, began to look about for the animal belonging to the guide.

As he did so a horseman rode up.

His horse carried his head low, and seemed to have been hard ridden.

"Ho, guide, is that you?" asked the youth.

"Yes, who is you?"

"Willis Wynkoop."

"Oh, got you on guard, has they?"

"No, I came here to meet you upon your return."

"Well, here I is; but hain't there no guard over ther horses?"

"I haven't seen any."

"What's up, young pard?"

"I want to have a talk with you, so come to the edge of the timber."

"Anything gone wrong?"

"Do you know Buffalo Bill?"

"Does I know him?" and the guide started at the question, and glanced quickly about him, as though expecting to see the scout appear before him.

CHAPTER XX.

MISSING.

The guide was a man of large stature, broad-shouldered, and with a full-bearded face and bushy long hair.

His rifle was slung at his back, and he carried three revolvers and a long knife in his belt.

Willis Wynkoop could not but see that he had been startled by hearing the name of Buffalo Bill.

"What do you know of him, guide?" asked the youth.

"I hain't friendly with him, so I has little ter say in his favor."

"He are plucky, oh, yes, but he's too good for this earth, and kinder thinks all other men is sinners thet hain't like him."

"Is he an officer at the fort?"

"He's Chief of Scouts."

"Do you go often to the fort?"

"When I is out of provisions; but why did you ask me about Buffalo Bill, pard?"

"Oh, I just wanted to know about him."

"Well, it's little good I'll tell yer of him, for we don't git along tergether."

"Has he wronged you in any way?"

"He have said things about me I don't like."

"Where have you been to-day?"

"A long way ahead, on the trail."

"Did you see any Indians?"

"Nary redskin."

"Then we have nothing to fear from them?"

"No."

"They is all up in the Big Horn Country, and there haint a redskin in a hundred miles of us."

"I am glad to hear that; but then father has decided to take another trail."

"Take another trail?" quickly asked the guide.

"Yes, he wishes to branch off and seek a valley he has been posting himself about."

"What does he know about this kentry? He must not be a fool, yer pa mus'n't, for I knows whar ter take yer."

"He wants to go up into the Sunshine Valley somewhere."

"He's away off. He kin only go ther way I takes him, and after we git through Sunshine Pass, if he don't like thet country, why, I kin show him other valleys ter set le in; but I'm sartin he'll never go, once he seen ther lay of ther land beyond Sunshine Pass."

"So I think, and I'm anxious to get settled; but, let me tell you something, for I'm your friend, Scott, and I don't want to see you get into trouble."

"Who is it thet is goin' ter git me inter trouble?"

"I asked you if you knew Buffalo Bill?"

"Yas. Has any word from ther forts

cume ter camp?" asked the guide, quickly.

"Not exactly, but Buffalo Bill is here."

The guide's start at this information could not be hidden, and he echoed, in evident trepidation:

"Buffalo Bill here—in this camp?"

"Yes, right here, in this camp. He came late this afternoon."

"Alone?"

"Yes; or, rather, he returned with me, for I met him while I was scouting about."

"What did he come fer?"

"He saw our trail, and was following it when I met him."

"He has sen yer pa?"

"Oh, yes."

"Had a talk with him?"

"Yes, a long one."

"Of course, he lit inter me, fer that's his style ter slander a man behind his back."

"He did not think we were just blessed in having you as a guide."

"I thought so."

"It is from what he told father of a better place to settle in that the trail is to lead in another direction."

"Cuss thet Buffalo Bill!"

"I might hev know'd it."

"He gave you a black eye, Pard Scotty."

"Whar is he?"

"Somewhere near asleep."

"Does yer know jist whar?"

"No, but don't look for him to-night."

"He will look you up in the morning, and I only wanted to warn you, so you would know what to expect, for he really did make a very cruel accusation against you, Pard Scotty."

"Well, I thank yer, young pard, and you won't find Jerome Scott fergit one who has been his friend."

"I know tha', Scotty, and I have some little work in hand for the future I wish you to help me with."

"What is it?"

"I can't tell you now, but I had more trouble to-day."

"No."

"Yes; but I'll go back to my bed now, for I wouldn't have anybody know I was out for a great deal."

"Good-night."

The guide stepped forward and held out his hand, and, grasping it, Willis Wynkoop turned away and returned to his tent.

Jerome Scott watched his departure, then turned, and saw not far away upon the ground an object lying.

"Why, it's ther guard, and he's asleep," said the guide, as he walked rapidly to where he had left his saddle and bridle.

It was now midnight, the guards were changed, and the camp was as quiet as the grave.

Just at dawn Buffalo Bill arose and went in search of the guide.

He had come in, he was told, during the night, but nowhere could he be found, and a thorough search of the camp revealed the fact that Jerome Scott, the guide, was missing.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN PURSUIT.

The whole camp was astir, as soon as it was reported that Jerome Scott had returned, but could not be found.

There were other things to tell, too, for his horse was there, well tired out, yet his saddle and bridle were gone.

And more, the major's favorite horse was missing, along with two more of the finest animals in the outfit.

Nor was this all, for there were people who missed certain things, a roll of fine new blankets had been taken from a

wagon, two pack saddles had disappeared, and half a dozen fine rifles, twice as many revolvers, and a large quantity of ammunition.

Provisions also had disappeared, and one settler reported seeing the guide leading two pack horses heavily laden.

The guard who was put over the horses at midnight said that Jerome Scott told him he had orders to go on ahead with supplies, and find a good halting place.

Some new axes, several hatchets, and a bolt of canvas had also disappeared, until it was known that the guide had escaped, and with him had gone much of value.

Major Wynkoop was astounded and deeply pained.

The departure of the guide showed that Buffalo Bill had been right; but, who had been the one to give the guide a warning of what he might expect if he stayed in camp to meet Buffalo Bill.

This Major Wynkoop was determined to find out.

"You need look only here, sir, for your son gave that warning," said the scout.

"Mr. Cody, I think this unkind, after what I said last night," returned the major.

"Ask him, sir?"

The youth was sent for, and asked who had warned the guide.

He did not know.

"Pardon me one minute, major," and Buffalo Bill walked quickly away from the tent.

He soon returned, accompanied by a settler, whom the scout asked:

"Were you guarding the horses last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Major Wynkoop, you have confidence in this man?"

"Perfect."

"Tell what happened last night, as you told me."

"I am sorry, major, to give you pain, but it need go no further than right here."

"What have you to say, Mr. Morse?"

"I suffered with cramps last night when on duty, but, not caring to rouse any one to take my place, I lay down in the timber, and there came to a spot near me your son and Jerome Scott."

"I thought they saw me, and I heard what they said."

"What was said, Mr. Morse?"

"Willis told the guide that Buffalo Bill was in camp, and meant to make some charge against him this morning."

"I soon after was relieved by Dan Bennett, and went to my camp."

"Thank you, Mr. Morse, and I am going to ask you not to speak of this to others."

"I will not, sir."

"It is true that Chief of Scouts Cody has charged that Jerome is a traitor and was leading us into an ambush, and his having fled from camp, and shown himself a thief also, is proof that the scout here is right; and knew his man."

"You, Willis, have warned the treacherous guide, who would have betrayed us, and thus enabled him to escape, get his redskin band, and attack us."

"I see my great wrong now, sir; but I could not believe Jerome guilty, and only wished to place him on his guard, that was all," and the youth dared not meet the eyes of Buffalo Bill, that sought his own.

The scout then proposed that he should take half a dozen of the men having the best horses, and pursue the guide, the train to come on to a point where a man would be left to guide it off on the trail Buffalo Bill wished them to take.

The major agreed to this, if Buffalo

ould take more men with him, and after breakfast, the scout rode away at the head of half a score good men and true, all well mounted, thoroughly armed, and supplied with a week's provisions.

Willis Wynkoop wished to go with the party, but his father preferred to have him remain with the train, and after the party rode away the youth heard some very plain language from the major, while both the mother and sister learned of what he had been guilty, the young girl muttering to herself:

"My brother will bear watching, I find, and I shall keep my eye upon him, or he'll do mischief yet."

Pulling out of camp, the major kept along the trail, which Buffalo Bill had left well marked, until noon, and then one of the scout's party was found waiting, for from that spot the train branched off toward the left. Buffalo Bill had given the man left in waiting exact instructions, and a hastily drawn map of the way to be taken, and it was a relief to all in the outfit to feel that night when they camped, that they were not on the path to destruction, and the great scout was between them and danger.

CHAPTER XXII.

READY FOR THE FOE.

Buffalo Bill well knew, when leaving the wagon train, that he had a dangerous and very slippery individual to go in pursuit of in Jerome Scott, the traitor guide.

He was aware that the man was splendidly mounted, and he had all of six hours the start.

But he wished to pursue him as far as possible, and let those with him see that the guide had fled to his Indian friends, while he did not intend to allow the renegade to lead his braves against the settlers and surprise them.

One of the men he left, as has been seen, to guide the train by another trail, and he had been directed to push on with it with all haste, and at noon the next day a splendid camping place would be found, a natural stronghold that could be easily defended against big odds, while the finest water and grass was right at hand, and wood in plenty.

Here the train was to remain until the return of the scout.

That night, by hard riding, Buffalo Bill came to the vicinity of Sunshine Pass, and taking two men with him he went forward on foot to the position from which he had reconnoitered the ambushed braves.

Going cautiously forward, he came to the spot he wished, and there, just as he had said they would, they found the warriors in camp, and several hundred strong.

They were where they could reach Sunshine Pass by a short ride, and once ambushed there, they could have utterly wiped out the wagon-train.

This the men saw, and they silently wrung the scout's hand, for all they held dear in life was with the train.

"I will go on alone, pards, so you wait for me here."

"It is useless to pursue that renegade, in fact, would be madness, for he is in that Indian camp; but you can to-morrow return to the train, and report what you have seen, and I will scout about here that those red fiends do not surprise you, yet still you must keep a double guard and the closest watch."

Buffalo Bill then started off, and he was gone for an hour.

"Come," he simply said, and led the way back to where the others awaited them.

Arriving at the halting place, Buffalo Bill said, earnestly:

"Pards, there are over five hundred braves there, and they are holding a big powwow."

"Scott Jerome is in their midst, for I saw him distinctly with my glass."

"That powwow means that they intend to make a dash for the train, and try and surprise and wipe it out."

"Fortunately, the train will reach the place I sent them to, by noon, earlier, if they press on hard, which they must do."

"Once there, you can stand off those redskins for days; but, as soon as I have had some supper, I will ride for Fort Aspen with all speed, and you must go back and join the train and urge them on."

"By to-morrow night I will be there with a body of troopers, for we will ride for our lives, and we'll give those redskins a surprise party that will tell."

Supper was soon over, and, impressed by what Buffalo Bill had said, the men saddled their horses, and, watching him start on one trail, they returned the way they had come.

It was just dawn when the men came to the wagon train, as it was getting ready to pull out, for Major Wynkoop was alive to the necessity of haste, as he well knew that the country he was then passing through was no place to be caught and corralled by a large force of Indians.

He listened with deepest interest to all the men had to report, and said, impressively:

"We all owe our lives to Buffalo Bill."

"It would have been another wipe-out, another Mountain Meadow massacre, but for him."

Glancing at his son, he saw that the youth at last began to realize that Jerome the Guide was a renegade, and had been leading them into a death-trap.

With all haste the train pushed on, and the horses and cattle were driven hard.

All seemed to feel how urgent it was that they should reach a place that could be defended.

It was a couple of hours before noon when the major, who was well ahead, came to the stronghold selected by Buffalo Bill.

"The very place! a natural fort, and with pasture, water, and wood right at hand."

"We can hold that hill against an Indian army," said the major, with enthusiasm.

It was a heavily wooded hill, and several springs were flowing out of it into a brook, winding half-way around its base.

Here was a fine grazing ground, and there the cattle could feed until driven up into the hill, where there was ample room for them, and a kind of natural corral.

The major saw all the advantages at a glance, a way was cut for the wagons, to the summit of the hill, and the men set to work to strengthen their position, arrange their camps in protected spots, and be ready for the red foes, who no one doubted would soon come.

Before nightfall the place was a fort, and the garrison in fighting trim.

And not a moment too soon, for, viewing the timber a mile away in the valley, the major said, with considerable vehemence:

"They have come!"

"I distinctly saw two redskins with my glass, skulking in that timber."

"We are to be attacked to-night, men, but forewarned, forearmed."

"Still, I shall look anxiously for Cody's coming, with the troopers, and only his breaking down will prevent his keeping his promise."

"Now, men, we must be ready for a night attack, an uncommon thing for redskins to do; but that renegade is their leader, and he hopes to surprise us."

"But, thanks to that noble scout, they will not," fervently said Mrs. Wynkoop, while Willis sneered to his sister:

"Bah! there are no Indians coming."

CHAPTER XXIV.

TO THE RESCUE.

Night came on with each man of the outfit on the alert.

Women and boys, too, were ready to do their part in the defense, for all realized fully that if the first rush of the redskins was not beaten off the end would come, and quickly.

There was hope that Buffalo Bill and the troopers would soon come, and then there would no longer be dread.

But all knew that the scout would have a long and hard ride of it to Fort Aspen, and the troopers would have to be driven to a killing pace to get to the relief of the train.

Then came the fear that the cavalry might be away from the fort just at the time when the scout wanted their services.

Night came on slowly, and not a sign of another Indian had been seen, save those discovered in the timber by Major Wynkoop.

But all felt sure that the dark, circling timber held secret foes.

The horses and cattle were driven into the natural corral of the stronghold, and all the men of the party could not but appreciate how wisely Buffalo Bill had chosen their position for them.

Thus several hours passed, the men began to nod on their posts, and many really thought that after all Willis Wynkoop might be right, for he had gone the rounds asserting that there were no Indians near, that they would not attack the camp if there were, and that he had still faith in the guide.

There was no doubt but that he had gone to the Indians, that the boy would not deny, for he could not doubt the men who had pursued him; but he had been driven to seek safety there from the persecution of Buffalo Bill, for all knew that the scout's charge against him would quickly cause him to be shot or hanged.

The guards were changed at midnight, and Major Wynkoop was wide awake and on the alert.

There were a number of good bordermen in the train, raised, as they had been, in Kansas, and these kept well out around the hill to guard against surprise.

At last there was a glimmer of light on the eastern horizon that betokened day's approach, and the major was beginning to feel that the attack would not be made, when the outer guards came running in, and reported that hundreds of redskins on foot were creeping up to the attack.

The dark mass soon became plainly visible, and then Major Wynkoop gave the order to fire.

The blaze of flame from the guns lighted up the plain, and the redskins were revealed, ready for the rush.

The volley was a surprise to them, where they had expected to surprise, and many a warrior bit the dust.

But, confident in numbers, with yells that were appalling, they made a rush

for the hill, and the battle of life and death was on.

So mad was the rush, so determined was the red foe to break in upon the camp, led, as they were, by their white leader, for he was seen by the light of the rifles, in the thickest of the fray, that it seemed for a while that the hill would be carried.

But, just as brave hearts began to grow cold with dread, there was heard a loud call of a bugle, and with cheers a couple of troops of cavalry dashed out of the timber in the rear of the redskins, and charged upon them.

There was the clashing of sabres, the popping of revolvers, and loud cheers, followed by a stampede of Indians, who broke for the cover nearest to them.

They realized that the cavalry had taken them in the rear, thus first capturing their ponies, and that they had to seek safety in flight afoot.

The dawn had come, and the field was seen to be strewn with dead braves, with here and there a soldier and his horse lying in their midst!

The tall form of Buffalo Bill had been seen at the head of the troopers, who were now scattered, pursuing the Indians.

Soon after the soldiers began to return toward the hill, and go into camp in the valley.

Their horses were worn out by their long, all-night ride, and they could not push the Indians in their flight, but then they had captured all their ponies, the warriors were scattered, on foot, and in rapid run, and there was nothing more to fear from them, while a severe punishment had been dealt them, which they would not soon forget.

Buffalo Bill and Captain Norris, the officer in command, were joined at the base of the hill by Major Wynkoop, who said, with deepest feeling:

"Never did help arrive more opportunely, Cody, than the gallant command you brought to the rescue, and we will never forget you, nor you, Captain Norris, and your gallant soldiers."

"We only did the hard riding, sir, and charged after we reached the scene, while the result fully repays us: but Cody here deserves all credit, for he has made a wonderful ride of it, I assure you," responded Captain Norris.

"And lying on the field over there, Major Wynkoop, is your traitor guide, though he has been wounded and trampled out of all shape, so we can barely recognize that he is a white man," said Buffalo Bill.

The troopers went into camp for breakfast and to bury the dead, and, as the horses were well used up, it was decided not to start on the return to the fort until the following day.

Then the cavalry pulled out for the fort, and the wagon train, now under the guidance of Buffalo Bill, started for the lovely valley which the scout had selected as the future home of the settlers.

It was upon the morning of the third day that the train passed through a pass in the mountains, into a valley of rare beauty, and the very place for a happy home.

Here Buffalo Bill left them upon the next day, but ere he did so he sought an interview with Willis Wynkoop, and said:

"I wish to warn you not to forget your pledge, for upon you rests the continuing or not of the feud between your people and the Duncans, for distance must be great between you to prevent bloodshed."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PLOT TO AVENGE.

Weeks passed away, and the Wynkoop settlement had prospered.

Houses had been erected, a church and school-house had followed, crops had been planted, and there was not one of the new settlers who was not pleased with his venture in the wild west.

Willis Wynkoop had organized a party of youths into a company numbering a dozen or more, and they facetiously called themselves the "Regulators."

They did the hunting and fishing for all, were the scouts to see that no Indians were near, and the settlers felt at ease with this band of brave boys as their protectors.

One of these youths, Hal Halpine by name, was the particular pard of Willis Wynkoop.

The two were constantly together, and they were known as about the best plainsmen in the valley.

They were wont to take long scouts together, sometimes being gone for days, and much praise was bestowed upon them for what they did.

One afternoon the two rode away from the valley, saying that they would be gone for some days.

They went well mounted, armed, and with a week's supplies.

As they left the valley through the pass, they turned to the left, and rode off in a northwesterly direction.

This they kept up until night, when they went into camp, having ridden at a very good pace and put thirty miles and more behind them.

As they sat by their campfire after supper, Willis Wynkoop said:

"Hal, I am now going to tell you the truth about the lone scouts I have been making."

"It's about time, Willis, for I have been serving you rather faithfully in hiding your absence from the others, for the boys could not understand why you did not take them all with you, instead of going alone."

"All right, you shall know now. I believe you lost your father and uncle in the Wynkoop-Duncan feud?"

"Yes." "And as we left Kansas to stop the vendetta, you never had a chance to avenge them?"

"No, and I have always felt a regret that I could not."

"It was Doctor Duncan who killed your father, was it not?"

"Yes, Doctor, or Captain Duncan, for he has both titles."

"He was with another man and his son Ned, when they met my father and uncle, with a couple of other men, on the way to Leavenworth."

"How it was I do not just know, but I believe my uncle started the trouble; there was a hot, short fight, and three lives were lost."

"Your uncle and father fell then?"

"Yes, and the man with the Duncans; but the two with my father and uncle ran off. So Captain Duncan and Ned held the field, and took the bodies into Leavenworth."

"Well, I've got a secret to tell you."

"What is it?" "The Duncans are not content to let this feud rest, even though we left Kansas."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the whole Duncan clan have followed us out here."

"You don't mean it?"

"I do; they came soon after we did, and have settled just a hundred miles from our valley."

"That means trouble."

"Sure. They have a pleasant valley, as we have, and Ned Duncan is the leader of a band of Boy Regulators."

"They are prospering, too, for I have been to the valley, and I tell you that Ned Duncan intends to make a strike at us some day."

"No doubt."

"You know he killed my brother Ralph?"

"Yes; but Ralph was to blame for that, all our people admit."

"That's all right; but the fact remains that Ned Duncan killed him, and I am out on a trail of revenge."

"You know best."

"I have reconnoitred the country about the Duncan settlement, and there is a large, almost barren plain this side of it."

"Across this, to a little valley, Ned Duncan goes to hunt, for there is plenty of game there. He generally goes alone, or with only one companion, for he seems not to wish to give the secret away, and Saturday is the day he goes."

"How do you know?"

"I have been in disguise in the settlement, and I know a great deal about his movements."

"Well?"

"Now, I asked you to come with me just as soon as I knew how to act, and my plan is to waylay Ned Duncan and force him to fight me a duel."

"I hope to catch him alone, for then you can be the second of both, and in that case, as my friend, you will see that I don't run any risks."

"That's so, and you know I'll do it, Willis, for if the Duncans have followed us here for trouble, they must not be disappointed, and when the fight begins in this wild land it will mean a wipe-out for them, for we must strike first and hard."

"Yes, at Ned Duncan."

"Does your father know?"

"Not a soul save you."

"Well, I'm with you," was the determined reply of Hal Halpin.

Willis Wynkoop was happy, for thus far his plot to get rid of Ned Duncan was shaping itself as he intended it should.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BUFFALO BILL FOLLOWS A TRAIL.

The Duncan wagon train had been guided by Lew Sykes, as had been suggested by Buffalo Bill, and the result was that they found themselves in a most charming country in which to settle.

They had gone to work, one and all, with a will, and believing themselves no longer cursed by the feud that had brought death and sorrow upon them for years, the hearts of all became lighter.

By a strange coincidence, a band of Boy Rangers had been organized—fifteen in number—just as had been the case in the Wynkoop settlement.

Of this band of young rangers Ned Duncan had been made the leader without a dissenting voice.

But Ned was wont to scout much alone, and in of these pilgrimages had come upon a beautiful little valley where game was most plentiful.

Nor was this all, for the youth had picked up there a handful of little pieces of gold!

Keeping the secret, he had hoped to find a gold mine, or that the valley would pan out considerable more of the precious yellow metal than he had, in his hasty search, been able to locate, or ascertain was there.

Ned had been appointed the young school-master at "Duncan Farms," as the valley homes had been called, and he sought every morning, he had only all day Saturday for his explorations in his gold valley, so was wont to start for before dawn when he could do so.

Low Sykes had left the settlement, after his work had been finished, but several days after the arrival of the train on the scene of their future home Buffalo Bill had arrived.

He was known personally to some of the people, and he had a warm welcome from all, especially Ned Duncan, though the latter did not say that he had before met the scout.

Buffalo Bill, however, found a chance to have a long talk with Ned Duncan, and told him of the happenings to the Wynkoop people, and just where they had located, adding that he trusted the two settlements were too far apart to have trouble, even should the people meet.

It was after the Wynkoop settlement was getting along swimmingly that Buffalo Bill arrived on a visit.

He was pleased with the way matters were prospering, and he and Major Wynkoop had a long talk together, the latter telling him that his son had been made heartily ashamed of himself for his protection of the renegade guide, Scott Jerome, whose fate had been a just one.

Then the major told the scout that he was sorry Willis was not there to meet him, but he had been made captain of the Boy Regulators of the valley, and had gone off on a scout only that morning, accompanied by a single pard.

It was just dawn the next morning when Buffalo Bill left the valley, and by seemingly a strange coincidence he went off in the very direction taken by Willis Wynkoop and Hal Halpine.

In fact, after getting out of the pass it was seen that Buffalo Bill was following the trail of the two youths.

That trail he found led toward the northeast, and the scout readily told that the pace of the two horses ridden by the boys had been a good one.

The scout's splendid roan went along at a swift gait also, and after three hours he came to where the two boys had camped for the night, and where Hal Halpine had been told by Willis Wynkoop the secret he held of the presence of the Duncans in that country.

It was growing well along in the afternoon when Buffalo Bill came to the edge of a large plain.

Across this led the trail of the two horses he was following.

As far as the eye could reach all was almost barren, and the plain, with its rugged hills looked like a vast sea.

There was just enough of a green hue from the short grass to give the idea of billows, tossed by a storm.

The plain was rugged here and there, seamed with ravines, and the scout found it hard traveling for his horse.

Afar ahead was a range of green mountains, and beyond these was the valley of Duncan Farms.

But Buffalo Bill had drawn his horse down to a walk, and did not appear to have any intention of continuing on to Duncan Farms that night.

Something far ahead on a rise had attracted his attention, and he had been watching most closely the trail he was following, for it appeared to attract his attention more particularly as he rode on.

Suddenly he rode down into a deep ravine, and there dismounted.

He had made some discovery, and

when he had dismounted his first act was to look to his weapons.

Some danger evidently threatened, for the scout was not one to halt on a trail he was following without good reason.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FACING ODDS.

Ned Duncan was returning from what he was pleased to call his Gold Valley.

He had picked up some more gold, though not enough to make him wildly enthusiastic over it, and was on his way to Duncan Farms, where he would arrive several hours after sunset.

But for that he did not care, as he had become a most expert plainsman.

He was alone, and his horse was going leisurely along, when suddenly he pricked up his ears, as though he scented danger.

The youth was at once upon his guard. It might be a wolf only; yet it might be a prowling redskin, and already had the youth had experience with an Indian foe.

He had been "jumped" by a small party of redskins one afternoon, and it had been a race for life.

But Ned Duncan had knocked a redskin off his pony, when they began to crowd his tired horse, and so had made his escape.

Since then he was always on the alert for Indians that might cross his path.

He was going across the barren plain that lay between him and the mountain range sheltering Duncan Farms, when suddenly his eyes fell upon a trail.

"Two horses, and both shod, so the riders are not Indians," he said to himself.

"But who can they be?"

"I must be on my guard," he continued, and as he went over a rise in the plain he was suddenly confronted by two horsemen.

It was evident that they had long seen him coming, and were ready for him, for they had their rifles in their hands.

His was slung at his back.

He recognized one at a glance, halted, and called out:

"Well, Willis Wynkoop, I know you, and you appear to be lying in wait for me."

He was not a hundred yards from the two youths, and he distinctly heard the reply:

"It is just what I am doing, Ned Duncan."

"What do you wish?"

"You escaped me once, through that accursed scout, Buffalo Bill, but this time there is no one to protect you, and I demand that you give me a chance to avenge my murdered brother Ralph."

"I had hoped that our paths would not meet again, Willis Wynkoop, but so it is, and I suppose I must yield."

"If you refuse you will have to admit you are a coward."

"I will never admit that."

"Then meet me."

"Will you allow me to go on to my home and return with a friend, for you have one?"

"No, for you would bring back a gang to murder us."

"I am not that kind of a boy, Willis Wynkoop, as you well know."

"You must meet me here."

"I see that you would murder me if I refused."

"We'll force you to fight."

"Name your weapons and distance."

"My friend Hal Halpine here will act for you as well as for me."

"He will load the weapons."

"My weapons I keep loaded, and I do not care for his services."

"All right."

"What is your game?"

"Ride back a hundred feet, as I will, and then let your friend give the word to fire, and we'll use rifles."

"If we fail to kill, then we can draw our revolvers, and ride toward each other."

"That suits me."

"How about you, Hal?"

"I am agreed."

"All right, Ned Duncan, turn and ride to your post, for I came here to force a fight out of you, and I'll do it."

"I am not backing down, Willis Wynkoop, so spare your breath; but I'll not turn my back on you, or your friend, whom I see has his rifle ready also."

"He will see fair play."

"I will see to that myself, and I have had experience of turning my back on you, as you certainly have not forgotten."

"Stop talk and act," angrily called out Willis Wynkoop.

"All right, start for your post," and Ned Duncan took up his reins and begun to slowly back his horse to the starting point.

He would not again turn his back upon his foe, knowing his treachery.

Bith Willis Wynkoop and Hal Halpine burst out into a rude laugh at his act, but he called:

"Ah, I know you, Willis Wynkoop, and birds of a feather, you know, flock together."

Slowly, then, the brave boy, brought to bay by two foes, backed his horse to the starting point.

Hal Halpine said something to Willis Wynkoop which Ned Duncan did not catch, but neither of the two moved from the position they held, and both had their rifles in hand.

Seeing this, Ned Duncan halted and swung his rifle around for use, and the movements of his enemies showed that they intended to get in the first fire, and both together.

But suddenly there spurred into view over the ridge of a ravine Buffalo Bill, and his rifle was at a level, while he shouted, in thunder tones:

"Hands up, there, you cowards, for I hold the drop in this game!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

Had a stroke of lightning shivered the ground at their feet the two cowardly youths could not have been more amazed and terrified than they were at the sudden coming of Buffalo Bill.

Like an apparition horse and rider had appeared upon the scene, coming out of the ground, as it appeared.

Ned Duncan was as startled as were his enemies.

At a glance he recognized the daring Chief of Scouts, and while his heart gave a great bound of joy, he sighed like one who had escaped death by the narrowest margin.

Doubting Willis Wynkoop as he had, he had yet not been as cautious as he might, and he had seen too late that the two would fire on him and he would not be ready.

But he was utterly fearless, and meant to die game.

Then had appeared the scout to his rescue.

Hal Halpine had seen Buffalo Bill when he had guided the train, and of course knew him well.

He greatly admired the famous scout, and a flush of deep shame came to his

face, as he felt that he had been caught by him in a very cowardly act.

He did not know what to say or do.

So he sheepishly lowered his rifle and remained silent and crestfallen.

As for Willis Wynkoop, he turned to the hue of death.

His rifle fell with a loud ring upon the ground, and his hands trembled as though he had a chill.

He was utterly undone. A second time had Buffalo Bill thwarted him in an attempt to murder his bitter foe, Ned Duncan.

Was it accident?

Was it design?

Was it Fate?

These thoughts flashed through his fevered mind.

His teeth chattered, and he was the picture of despair and terror.

Of course, he felt now that if the scout did not kill him, he would betray him to his people, and how cowardly he had behaved toward a brave and noble foe.

He glanced at Hal Halpine.

That youth was as silent as a statue.

His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

Buffalo Bill's face was dark with anger, and his eyes fairly blazed as he turned them upon Willis Wynkoop.

Riding forward, his rifle ready, he called out:

"You need not raise your hands, you young cowardly curs, for you have not the strength to do so in your terror."

"Come, Boy Pard, and we'll clip the claws of these two fellows, who were so brave a moment since, when they had you at a disadvantage."

Ned Duncan rode forward also, and he met the scout in front of the two culprits, whose horses had approached each other, and stood side by side.

"Well, Willis, you've put us into a bad box. I'd rather have died than have Buffalo Bill catch us as he has," muttered Hal Halpine.

Willis Wynkoop made no reply. He could not have uttered a word if his life had depended upon it.

As the scout met Ned Duncan he held out his hand and grasped that of the brave youth.

"Glad to see you, my young Kansas Kid, and we meet as we have met before," he said.

"Yes, and again I owe you my life, Mr. Cody."

"Don't mention it, for lives are cheap in this country."

"But let me tell you now that I dropped into the Wynkoop settlement, and was told, by a certain young lady there, that she was sure her brother was plotting to have the feud of the Duncan-Wynkoops renewed."

"She said he was making certain long pilgrimages alone quite often, and asked me to take his trail and see where he had gone."

"I did so, and I saw Willis Wynkoop and his pard here in hiding. I also discovered you approaching; so I manoeuvred for a good position to play my trump card, and got it."

"Yes, you always know just what to do, sir, to help one in distress," remarked Ned, with much feeling.

"You were in a bad fix, as any brave fellow is who is fighting odds, and cowards."

"We have caught Wynkoop at his old tricks of assassination, and it is for you, my kid from Kansas, to say if we carry him to your settlement and let them try him for his life."

"No! no! they would hang him, yes, and Hal Halpine too."

"Just like you, Kansas Kid."

"How guilty you are, young Halpine, I do not exactly know, but I liked you, and am sorry to find you in such bad company."

"You are not more sorry than I am, Mr. Cody," and tears stood in the eyes of Hal Halpine.

"Well, let this be a lesson to you: but now, Kansas Kid, what are we to do with Wynkoop?"

"Do you leave it for me to say, Mr. Cody?"

"Yes."

"Try him on oath once more not to tell that the Duncan settlement is where it is, and let him go, along with Hal Halpine, who I am sure was led by Willis Wynkoop to do as he has."

"You are too generous, Kansas Kid, though perhaps I would do the same: but your word goes, and I'll let them return to their home, while you, Halpine, just say to Miss Hilda Wynkoop for me that I found her brother and yourself, that there was no bloodshed, and that the secret is still safe."

"I will, sir."

"As for you, Wynkoop, I wish to tell you that I scout this country a good deal, and I shall keep my eye upon you, so look out that you do not give me a third chance to catch you in deviltry, for nothing will save you then. I'll kill you as I would a wolf."

"Now, go your way in a hurry, for I will ride on with my kid from Kansas here to his home."

At the words of the scout Hal Halpine breathed a fervent volume of thanks to him and to Ned Duncan.

But, though the lips of Willis Wynkoop moved, he uttered no word, and driving the spurs into his horse he dashed away, followed by Hal Halpine at a more leisurely pace.

Buffalo Bill and Ned Duncan watched them for some minutes, and then rode on toward Duncan Farms, where the scout found a warm welcome.

And well he deserved it, for he had put his iron hand down upon the youth who had been so determined to keep up the bitter vendetta between the Duncans and the Wynkoops.

THE END.

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